

CAMBRIDGE HARKENER

CELEBRATING THE HERITAGE OF CAMBRIDGE, VERMONT

Vol. XV, No. 4

July 2020

Current Officers & Directors

President: Joel Page
 Vice President: Rick Fletcher
 Secretary: Richard Gagne
 Treasurer: Georgeana Little

Directors: Lynn Austin, Diancy Boyden,
 Richard Gagne, Barb Juell,
 Georgeana Little, Peter Opstrup

Honorary Board Members: June Dodge

SECRETS of CAMBRIDGE'S CEMETERIES

Jennifer Bartlau

Stone House Sunday Drive

Remember "Sunday Drives?" This is a wonderful time of year for a back road tour of the beautiful stone houses that Giddings Cemetery resident George Majors built between 1795 and 1833.

The Giddings Yard is our western-most cemetery. It is located right on the Fairfax border on land that was owned by the Giddings family whose home farm is now the Vermont Woodworking School on Route 104. George Majors built a log cabin on the hill behind where the house and barn stand now at little over ½ a mile from the Cambridge town line.

The inscription on his tombstone hints of a fascinating story. "In memory of George Majors who died Aug 2nd 1842 ae 87 years. He was a native of Germany and came to America in Burgoyne's army. He deserted at Ticonderoga and joined the American army at Bennington as a volunteer. He was a faithfull [sic] republican, and served during the Revolution. At the close of the war he married and settled in Sunderland, Vt. From thence he moved to Essex, from thence to Fairfax in 1800, where he spent the remainder of his days an industrious farmer and a true Christian. S-13879"

According to his military pension file, George Majors was born Georg Mager in Frankfurt, Hesse, Germany around 1754 or '55. He joined the Hesen-Hanau Chasseur Corps as a rifleman in the Fall of 1776, shipping out for Canada before winter set in. Commonly called "Jägers" (huntsman), the Chasseurs were elite infantry troops renowned for their marksmanship and scouting skills. In June 1777, he was part of British General Barry St. Leger's ill-fated diversionary expedition to capture Fort Stanwix in Rome, NY, retreating back to Ft. Ticonderoga by the middle of September.

George relates how he was sent out from Mt. Independence later that month to spy on the American camp at Castleton, when his sergeant asked if he would join him in deserting to the other side. When intercepted by some Vermont militia troops they were told to lay down their arms to "which they cheerfully complied." The Vermonters took him back to the militia Fort at Castleton where he was examined, then marched to Arlington and Bennington for further questions. Once free, he joined Col. Ebenezer Allen's regiment, spending most of his time guarding Forts Mott and Vengeance in Pittsford (the northernmost outpost after the British capture of Ft. Ticonderoga and Mt. Independence) against any incursions by the British or Native tribes from the north. He was sent out from these forts on scouting missions to "watch the motion of the enemy, and especially the Tories [Loyalists], who were almost constantly making inroads upon the inhabitants." George was discharged in May of 1782 at Bennington.

George lived for a time during and after the war at Bennington, Arlington, and Sunderland, then Essex by 1790, and finally Fairfax by 1800, where he remained until his death. Sometime in 1780, he married Bathsheba or Barsheba (last name unknown); his first child was born in Sunderland in 1781. Census records between 1790 and 1840 show he



Early History of Cambridge

by Ida Morgan Anderson

Beginning in 1935, Ida Morgan Anderson began serializing a column on the History of Cambridge in the *Cambridge Town Crier*. Many of our readers may remember the series of 27 Installments. The Harkener continues publishing the installments for a new audience on the assumption that the copyright (if it ever existed) has long since expired. We hope you will enjoy these "blasts from the past."

Installment Six

"There were giants on the earth in those days." These words come into mind as we look back at the first settlers. Not giants in stature, but in ability and strength of purpose. Fortunately they were not molested by Indians. The road past Mountain View Cemetery followed an old Indian trail which led from the river to a spring on the farm now owned by O.W. Learned. Judging from the number of arrowheads found near the spring, the Indians must have camped there.

Miles from any supplies, and with roads only mere trails marked by blazed trees, men were forced to be self supporting. Beside the foot prints of every pioneer, went the foot marks of cattle and sheep on whom they must depend for food and clothing, perhaps even for life itself. As they brought fertile fields out of the surrounding forest, they brought in that other pioneer of civilization. The apple tree!

Ezra Mudgett set out the first orchard in town on what is now O.W. Learned's farm. As the trees came into bearing he was surprised and regulated his welcome accordingly. He said, "When folks come to see Mudgett, they get apples and cider; but when they come to see apples and cider they don't get nothin' but Mudgett."

A man's flock of sheep and field of flax furnished the family's clothing. In those first days it required sixty-four bushels of barley to buy a yard of broadcloth and a bushel of wheat to buy a yard of calico, so everything was necessarily home made.

Ashes from the great log heaps burned while clearing up the land, were the only commodity that could be sold. So several men would hitch their oxen to a great sled loaded with ashes and fodder for the teams, and take the long journey to

Montreal where most of their trading was done.

On one of these trips one of the party found a quantity of broken window glass thrown out on a back street. He carefully brought it home, laid it on a board in a kind of pattern, and marked around each piece. Then cutting the same shaped pieces from the board, he fastened the glass securely into the holes and had a window with real glass in it. A board with glass insets. For many years his curious window lay in the attic in the Daniel Blaisdel house at North Cambridge, and at last was thrown away by someone who did not realize its historical value.

In some towns the hardwood ashes provided people with another source of income in the manufacture of potash. As they cleared up the land the logs were piled in great heaps and burned. Barrels were provided with a false bottom perforated with holes and laid on cross sticks a little above the real bottom. A layer of straw was placed on this false bottom, and the ashes in which was mixed 1-20 of lime was poured in, pounded down, and drenched with water. The lye as it trickled through was poured into great iron kettles called "potash kettles", and boiled down

till it became syrupy. then the heat was checked and the lye grew thick and solid as it grew cold. It was reddish brown in color and intensely alkaline, and was dug out with difficulty. It was purified by being heated in ovens where it lost the remaining water, much of its sulphur and other matters. A white product was left with a bluish or pearly cast which was called "pearlash." This took the place of soda in the early days, and mothers sent their children

"up to the potash to get some pearlash" to use in cooking. Old cook books gave directions for using pearlash in biscuits and cake. Later it was refined into "saleratus", and still later into soda. I do not think potash was ever manufactured in Cambridge.



Continued from Page 1

had 3 sons and 4 daughters, some who stayed in Vermont, others who moved "out West." He was listed as "engaged in manufacture" on the census records as well – farming was not his primary occupation.

How did George Majors become an accomplished stonemason? He most likely apprenticed in Frankfurt prior to joining the military at age 21 or 22. Since the Middle Ages in the German principalities, it was customary for 10-15 year olds to be apprenticed for 7 years. Once their apprenticeship was through, a man could choose to become a journeyman and eventually a master, although many did join the Hessian military instead, as they valued and needed other skills besides soldiering. Regardless of how he learned, George Majors is known to have built at least 5 houses in Fairfax, Fairfield, Fletcher, and Cambridge. I believe he also was the architect of 3 or 4 others, all but one of which stand today. All were surveyed 30 or so years ago for the Vermont State Historic Register.

While most of these homes have been altered with the addition of ells, porches, or dormers, one can still discern the basic structure. Seven of them are 1 ½ story Cape Cod style buildings which originally would have had a center chimney. One is a 2 ½ story Federal style. All have large lintel stones over the front doorway and front windows. That these houses have survived for 200+/- years is a testament to the builder's skill and forethought.

If you are at all curious, and feel adventurous, it is a lovely drive on paved and dirt roads through Lamoille and Franklin County farm country to tour all of George Major's stone farmhouses. By order of estimated date built, here are their locations:

1. Circa 1795: Route 104, Fairfax, home of Fairfax Family Physical Therapy, on left heading North

2. Circa 1800: Fletcher Road, Fairfax, just over the Fletcher line on right heading West

3. Circa 1810: Lapland Extended Road, Fairfield, about 5 miles from Route 108N, via Whitney Road and Lost Nation Road. House is almost ½ mile down Lapland Extended. There is a turn-around spot just past the house.

4. Circa 1811: Upper Pleasant Valley Road, Cambridge, on left just past Porter's Repair heading South

5. Circa 1825: River Road, Fairfax, the "Sweet Farm" on right about 1 mile from Pumpkin Harbor Road heading West

6. Circa 1827: Howrigan Road, Fletcher, the Howrigan Home Farm – easiest to visit after #3, continue on Lapland Road (Lapland becomes Howrigan Road), 2 ½ story house on left 3 miles

from house #3. [Continuing another mile will bring you to Fletcher Road. A left here will take you back to Pumpkin Harbor Road past some of the best views in the area]

7. Circa 1830: Stonehouse Drive, Fairfield, off Route 36, on left 2 miles East of Fairfield. Hard to see from main road, as it is behind the barn. Turn left on Ryan Road just past to see it from a distance.

8. Circa 1833: Route 104 in field across from Vermont Woodworking School. This house was torn down a couple years ago. A modern blue house sits there now. **Note: the road used to continue straight from River Road around the base of the hill and right in back of where the stone house used to be. The water level in the 1927 flood reached the ceiling, and probably contributed to its demise.

There is also a stone house on Polhemus Road in Cambridge for which there are conflicting build dates. If it was built prior to 1840 (I've seen 1825 on a real estate listing), then it is probable that George Majors built it. He was "the only game in town" it seems for this type of stone work.

Earliest of George Majors' stone houses, Route 104, Fairfax
Picture from business website



The 1825 (?) house on Polhemus Road, Cambridge
Picture from Zillow.com



Resources:

https://www.nps.gov/parkhistory/online_books/fost/history/history-sec4.htm

<https://revolutionarywar.us/year-1777/battle-fort-stanwix/>

<http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~amrevhessians/military/index.htm>

https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=history_honproj

<https://www.northamericanforts.com/East/vt.html>

<https://orc.vermont.gov/Resource/Show-Resource-Table.aspx>

<https://www.lagis-hessen.de/en/subjects/idrec/sn/hetrina/id/73221>

U.S. Find-a-Grave Index

U.S. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, 1800-1900 found on Ancestry.com

U.S. Rosters of Revolutionary War Soldiers & Sailors, 1775-1783 (p. 297, 508, 550) found on FamilySearch.org

Vermont Vital Records found at Ancestry.com

In our next issue, Jennifer will provide a map and directions for your own trip around George Majors' homes. You may contact Jennifer directly via email vtjen802@gmail.com.



Do you recognize this scene?.

This is a painting by Blanch Emily (B.E.) Coleman (1874-1959). Cambridge? Stowe?

If you can identify the picture let us know at paopstrup@hotmail.com.

Cambridge Historical Society
PO Box 16
Jeffersonville, VT 05464



The Board of the Cambridge Historical Society is still concerned about holding in-person meetings. We are now canceling our meetings through August. We have been able to reschedule the August meeting to October. Our September meeting on the history of Cambridge High School is still scheduled, but it too could be canceled. We will let you know.

We are so pleased that Jennifer Bartlau continues to provide interesting articles on the people of Cambridge. We look forward to her next installment

Stay Safe!

This Newsletter is one of the perks of membership, so to continue receiving The Harkener renew your membership, and THANK YOU.