ACTON Know your town March 2000

Acton Yesterday and Today

Acton's Beginnings

Acton, a suburban town 26 miles northwest of Boston, had its beginnings as land granted to the settlers of Concord for the pasturing of sheep and the harvesting of hay. The first resident was a Scottish prisoner of war whose indenture was purchased by the settlers of Concord to tend the town's sheep on the broad west meadows between Fort Pond Brook and Nashoba Brook. Eventually this shepherd, John Law, was granted his freedom and was successful in getting the town of Concord to grant him land in Acton. In 1735, seventeen families living in what was called The New Grants or Concord Village petitioned the General Court for permission to form a separate town. The reason for choosing the name Acton is not recorded, but there are several Actons in Middlesex and Suffolk, England.

The Colonial Period

During the colonial period, the number of Acton families increased. The town needed four schools, three cemeteries, a militia, and an iron works, as well as textile, grist and saw mills. When relations between the colonies and the King deteriorated, Acton elected a Committee of Correspondence and delegates to the outlawed Provincial Congress. As an additional act of defiance, Acton sent a list of grievances to King George III on October 3, 1774. This day, when Acton residents cast their lot against the Crown, is known as Crown Resistance Day.

On April 19, 1775, the Acton Minutemen joined companies of Minutemen and militia from nearby towns. They marched to Concord to defend the town against the British troops sent to confiscate arms from the colonials. In the advance led by the Acton Minutemen across the North Bridge in Concord, two Acton men were the first casualties. Captain Isaac Davis, who led the assembled Minutemen, was the first man killed at the bridge in a volley that also killed Abner Hosmer of Acton. The third Acton victim of the day was James Hayward, a schoolteacher. The monument in Acton Center is in their memory.

Acton's Commercial and Residential Development

Acton was primarily a farming community with apples as the main crop. Luke Blanchard alone shipped 60,000 barrels to Europe in one season before the end of World War II. The brooks in South Acton and North Acton were sites of mills, and after the railroads were built

through Acton in the 1840's, South Acton and West Acton grew as manufacturing sites. Piano stools, shoeboxes, butter churns, cigars, and pencils were among Acton-made products. Until the 1950's Acton consisted of village centers – west, south, east, and the center. Schools, churches, and shops marked each village.

The 1950's brought changes to Acton as all the towns near the newly completed Route 128 experienced rapid growth. Indian Village was the first of many housing developments to replace apple orchards and meadows. From 3500 residents in 1950, Acton has grown to become home to nearly 20,000 who live in apartments, condominiums, and single-family homes among the remaining stone walls, tree-lined country roads, and winding brooks.

Acton Minutemen Marching to Concord