

Historian finds fault with accepted Map of Westford in 1730

WESTFORD
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By George Adams Parkhurst

The "Map of Westford in 1730", showing many streets and the location of houses at the time Westford was incorporated, has generally been accepted as a picture of the layout of the town at that time.

This may not be the case.

A detailed scholarly report, recently published by local historical researcher William B. Prescott, points out that the map was probably prepared by, or for, Rev. E.R. Hodgman for inclusion in his "History of the Town of Westford in 1831".

In his report, Prescott cites five reasons that lead him to this conclusion and supports his theory, with many pages of proof obtained by personally studying early town and genealogical records.

Nothing on the map implies that it includes only those streets that were in existence in 1730, so this discovery in no way destroys the map's usefulness in locating early 18th century dwellings. It merely locates the houses in relation to streets

existing in 1831.

The five reasons cited are:

1.) The road network is too complex for the less than 100 families that resided here in 1730. Many roads shown on the 1730 map do not appear 100 years later on the 1831 survey.

Also, town records show that some of the roads shown on the 1730 map were not laid out until as much as 50 years after that date.

2.) In 1730, and until about 1744, the name of the town was spelled "WESTFORD". It seems reasonable that, if the map was prepared in 1730, the then extant spelling would have been used.

3.) Hodgman states in his history that no plan of the town at

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the time of incorporation (1729) was available.

4.) Individuals included on the first Westford tax lists, but whose residences Hodgman could not identify, do not appear on the map.

5.) Errors made by Hodgman in identifying some individuals on the first Westford tax lists are reflected on the map.

In addition to facts uncovered by Prescott in support of his theory, there is an untitled map in the Massachusetts State Archives bearing the notation, "The survey of this plan was taken in May 1795 by scale 200 rds to an inch and reported(?) distance 28 miles from the metropolis and 24 miles from the shire town." These were probably Boston and Cambridge respectively.

This map shows the Meeting House and Westford Academy

and only about eight roads. These were, undoubtedly, the main thoroughfares with the outlying farms being served by a few additional roads that were little more than cart paths in 1730, giving further credence to the theory that Westford did not have the network of streets shown on Hodgman's map.

For those interested in learning where the first settlers of Westford lived, the museum has some early maps, including that of 1730, for sale.

Prescott is to be commended for his thorough research which, among other things, uncovered the misinterpretation of Rev. Hodgman's map. Instead of being titled "Map of Westford in 1730", it should perhaps have been "Map Showing the Locations of Residences in Westford in 1730 in Relation to 1831 Streets".

George Parkhurst, a Chelmsford native, recently moved to Hildreth Hills with his wife, Barbara Hildreth Parkhurst. He has a keen interest in local history.