

THE GARDNER FARM

By Ellen Knight¹

Used first by farmers, most of the land in Winchester has been transformed into suburban residential lots. One example of how the farms evolved and disappeared may be traced through the history of the Gardner farm.



103-105 Cambridge Street, listed on the National Register of Historic Places since 1989

Five generations of the Gardner family lived on a farm which originated as a 300-acre tract south of Church Street lying on both sides of what is now Cambridge Street. At least four houses were built on the land, including the only two left standing, #103-105 and #89 Cambridge Street. The latter now forms three residences, since its shoe-shop wing was moved to 7 Gardner Place and the barn was converted to a home at 2 Gardner Place.

THE LOCATION

The Gardner houses, though now in Winchester, were built in Charlestown. They were not moved, rather the Charlestown boundaries changed. In 1842, the Gardner farm land was annexed to West Cambridge (Arlington) and eight years later to the new town of Winchester. The northern border of the Gardner farm was Church Street, formerly the line between Woburn and Charlestown. To the east it extended to the Symmes Farm, which in 1753 was annexed to Medford, making the Medford line the eastern boundary of the Gardner farm. The farm extended west to what is now the Arlington line and south to the river above the Mystic Lake. Cambridge Street ran through the property and was known popularly as Gardner's Road or Row.

THE ORIGINAL CHARLESTOWN LAND GRANT

The Gardner Farm was part of the land deeded by the Squaw Sachem to men of Charlestown. When the territory which now forms Winchester was divided among citizens of Charlestown, as recorded in 1638, a large tract of 160 acres was allotted to Increase Nowell. In addition, in 1652 Nowell was granted "all that part of lands which Squa Sachem gave formerly unto him, the which he had given to the Towne which lies on the south side of his lot next Woburn." This increased his farm to 300 acres.

RICHARD GARDNER FARM – First Generation – First House

Increase Nowell never built upon his land. His heirs sold the entire tract of land in 1656 to Thomas Broughton, who sold it in 1659 to Richard Gardner (c. 1619-1698), whose family lived and worked on the land for two centuries.

Gardner came to Massachusetts during the Great Puritan Migration. He was among the first settlers of Woburn, arriving there in 1642. Six years later, he received a ten-acre grant of land called Round Meadow, located on the east side of Cambridge Street, west of Winter Pond. There, near the west shore of the pond, he built a house about 1651, the year in which he married. Remains of the cellar were reportedly visible 200 years later.² After buying the Nowell property, according to tradition, he built a new house near the corner of Church and Cambridge about 1661. (The current 103 Cambridge St. may be on its foundation.) There, with his wife Anna and ten children, he lived until his death in 1698.



Richard Gardner's headstone in the First Burial Ground in Woburn.

HENRY GARDNER FARM – Second Generation

The 300-acre farm stayed intact not only during Richard's lifetime but also through that of his only surviving son, Henry. Richard left Henry (1658-1714) "all my farme, the house wherein I now live with all my houseing adjacent, and all the land thereunto belonging, within the bounds of Charlestowne." Henry lived on the farm all his life. Richard made a second bequest, this to his grandson John of "all that parcell of land which I purchased of Mr. Broughton which was formerly Squaw Sachem's gift to Mr. Increase Nowel."

HENRY GARDNER II FARM – First Partition of Gardner Farm – Third Generation

In the third generation, when there were three sons to inherit, the farm was divided. It was also in this generation that some land was sold out of the family. Son John, who graduated from Harvard College in 1715 and was ordained at Stow in 1718, sold 70 of the 100 acres bequeathed

him by his grandfather. That land then was farmed by the Hutchinson family, whose name is still preserved on Hutchinson Road. The rest of farm was divided, north to south, among son Henry, widow Hannah, and son Samuel. But all became Henry's after his mother died and his brother Samuel died without heirs. Thus, over two-thirds of Richard Gardner's farm was kept intact. Henry Jr. lived his entire life on the farm where his 12 children were born. After his death, the farm was inventoried at 220 acres.

LUCY GARDNER & SONS – The Second Partition – Fourth Generation

After Henry's death (1764), the farm was divided among his widow Lucy and four sons Edward, Samuel, Henry, and John (who also received Lucy's portion at her death). The Gardner brothers each lived and worked on their land. Though they bought and sold small parcels of land (sometimes among themselves), during their lifetimes the Gardner farm was essentially kept together. When the Middlesex Canal was finished in 1803, it ran through eastern sections of John, Edward, and Samuel's land.

Each of the four Gardner brothers had a house on his farm. Henry built upon High Street near the corner with Arlington Street. His wife Martha lived there until age 97 “and often used to tell of watching the smoke of the battle of Bunker Hill from the summit of Andrews Hill when she was a child of 10 or 11.”³ Son Deacon Henry Gardner inherited the property. After he died childless in 1838, the property was sold outside the family. Although the house still stood during the early twentieth century, it is now gone.

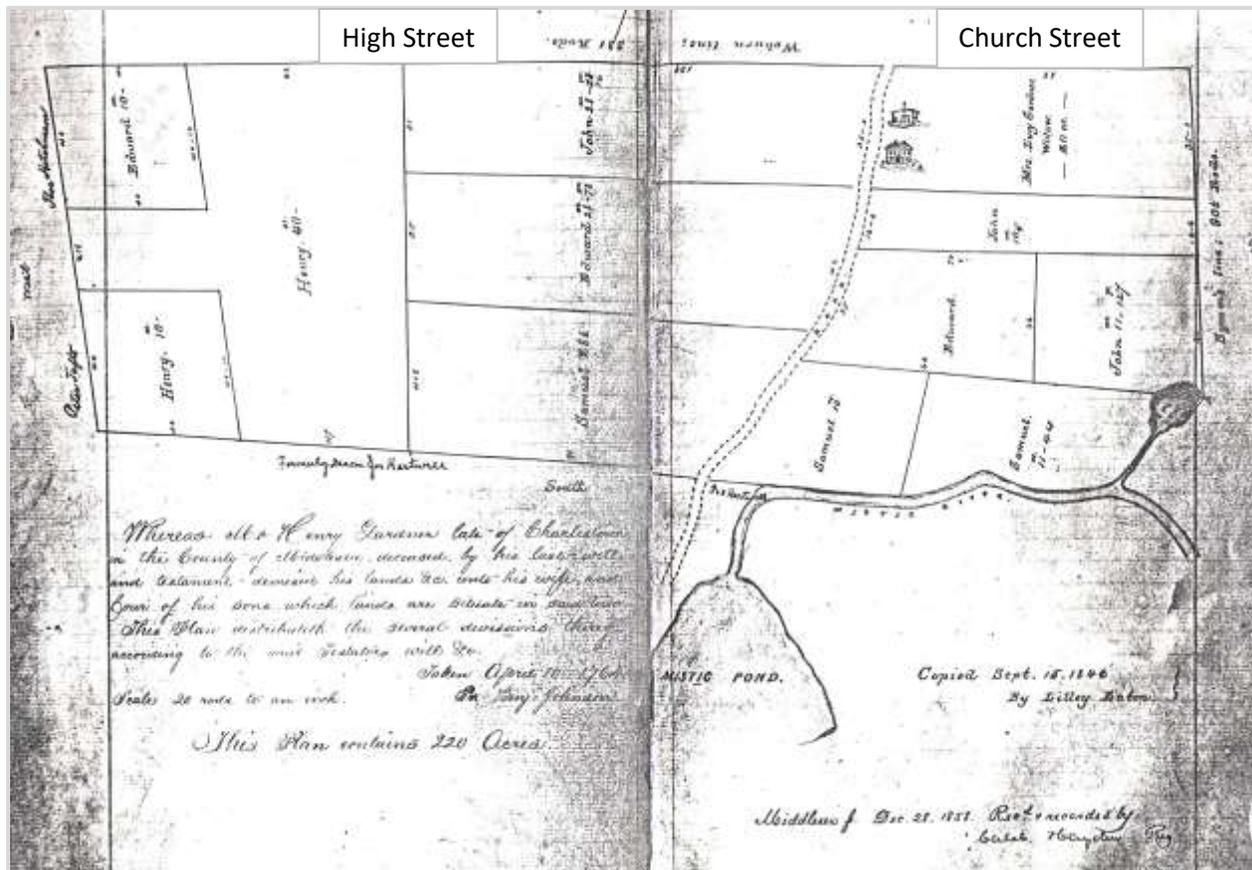
Samuel built upon the west side of Gardner's Road. In 1858, his son Samuel sold the property and moved to Reading. The new owner was former governor Edward Everett, who also purchased abutting property and built a home at today's Robinson Park. The Samuel Gardner house later burned down.⁴



Edward Gardner house, listed on the National Register since 1989, pictured before being divided into two residences

Edward built a house on the east side of Gardner's Road, south of his father's house, about 1740-1750. His son Edward sold his property to John Swan in 1818. Edward's house, known as the Gardner/Swan house, still stands at 89 Cambridge Street. It was later owned and renovated by architect Frank Patterson Smith (*see further below*).

The homestead and barn (at #103) were Lucy's until her death in 1785 when they became John's.



The 1764 partition of the Gardner Farm, then 220 acres.
 Cambridge Street is represented by a double dotted line.
 The Spring Pond on the right disappeared when the Mystic Lake dam was built.

JOHN GARDNER FARM – Fourth Generation

John Gardner (1745-1820) had 80 acres of land lying on both sides of Cambridge Street, about one-quarter of Richard Gardner's farm. After his death, his house was inhabited by his widow, Patience, and her unmarried daughters. His only son, John, had died in 1802 at age 22. After Patience's death in 1824, her estate was devised to her daughters: Sarah, Patience, Lucy (Mrs. Benjamin Wyman), Hannah (Mrs. Ellis Viall).

SARAH & PATIENCE GARDNER HOUSE – Fifth Generation

Between 1825 and 1864, the portion of the John Gardner farm on the east side of Cambridge Street was owned by Sarah (1771-1857) and Patience (1773-1864) Gardner, who bought out their sisters' shares in the property described as "the homestead socalled of John Gardner," 20 acres of land, and "all the buildings now standing thereon except one undivided half of the corn Barn socalled and hog stye," plus a second lot of 18 acres.

It is not clear when the house the sisters lived in was built. It is questionable that women already in their 50s would have built a new home in 1825.⁵ Their grandfather left his widow a "mansion house" in 1764. Possibly son John built a new house on the site. It is quite credible that different parts of the house were built at different times.⁶ Extensive renovations to the house have precluded dating the original structure.



After sister Hannah married Matthew Griswold in 1828,⁷ the couple shared the home with Sarah and Patience. The three sisters lived on the old Gardner farm until their deaths in 1857 (Sarah age 85), 1858 (Hannah age 81), and 1864 (Patience age 90). Patience was the last member of the Richard Gardner family to dwell on the old Gardner farm.⁸

Also sharing the farm was the Abel Green family, including wife Harriet and five children.⁹ Green apparently settled on Cambridge Street after his marriage in 1842, certainly by 1850.¹⁰ It was he who continued farming the Gardner land. According to the 1860 Census of Agriculture, he had one horse, one cow, and one swine, and his produce included 50 bushels of Indian corn, 100 bushels of Irish potatoes, \$50 orchard products, \$125 market garden, and ten tons of hay. For comparison, John Swan on the former Edward Gardner farm was growing 50 bushels of Indian corn, 75 bushels of Irish potatoes, \$100 orchard products, \$75 market garden produce, and 15 tons of hay on a similar acreage.

DIVISION OF PATIENCE GARDNER ESTATE & DEVELOPMENT

Reflecting the changing nature of the town, by the time of the Gardner sisters' deaths the land was more valuable for house lots than for farming. In 1864, Green inherited the John Gardner homestead property of 20 acres, excepting a lot of land along Church Street which Patience sold to the Town before her death for the relocation of the Wyman School. He did not keep it but rather sold out and moved to Malden where he died in 1871.

In 1872, Abijah Thompson bought the property in order to divide it and sell or mortgage lots. Thompson, first president of the Winchester Village Improvement Society and first president of the Winchester Historical & Genealogical Society, was a prominent citizen of the town. He did not live in the old Gardner house, which he assigned to George Rand (architect of Town Hall) and Frank Weston, who were contracted to improve the premises. What Thompson wanted was the land.

Originally, Thompson and his brother Stephen planned to develop land along the Aberjona at the foot of Mystic Avenue as a project similar to the later Rangeley development. Abandoning that idea, Abijah Thompson purchased the Gardner farm.

Thompson apportioned for himself a lot between the Wyman School (at the corner of Cambridge and Church Streets) and today's Glen Road, where he built his own home on Church Street (now site of the First Church of Christ Scientist). It was a grand, stylish house designed by Rand with grounds laid out by a former resident, the noted Boston landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland. The plan includes a kitchen garden, strawberry patch, grape vines, and asparagus bed. (A remnant of Thompson's estate survives at 29 Glen Green, where his stable was converted into a house.)



The Abijah Thompson House c. 1900, built 1873, designed by George Rand



At the time work on his house began, *The Middlesex Journal* commented that buildings other homes at this site would “make quite a settlement in this portion of the town which has not grown as fast as other portions.”¹¹ Again, however, Thompson gave up the idea of a neighborhood development (leaving Rand free to design houses for Rangeley).

The Gardner house lot then had its old north and south lot lines but was confined on the west and east between Cambridge Street and lots for the Wyman School, Thompson land, and what is now Glen Green.

The property went through a few more hands, including Joseph H. Tyler, another prominent Winchester citizen.¹² Tyler owned other property in Winchester and may not have lived in the Gardner house which he owned from 1883 until 1891 when he sold it to George & Abbie Bartlett. In 1900 the buildings on their property included a house, barn, and shed. It is probable that they did not purchase the entire lot that Tyler had owned. In 1896 and 1898 two houses were built on the southern section of former Tyler property, probably because that section of land was sold separately from the Bartlett lot.

FINAL DIVISION OF JOHN GARDNER FARM

In 1901, Abbey Bartlett sold the Sarah and Patience Gardner house with its present lot of about two-thirds acre to Bertha L. Fiske Bradford, of Providence, R.I. Though the house went through several more hands, at this point the property had assumed its final form.

Bartlett retained the rest of the land, but a few years after her death in 1902, her property was divided. The old Gardner house was soon surrounded by new 20th-century homes.



Remnants of the Gardner farm in 1906. The Gardner house at 103 Cambridge Street (belonging to Bertha L. Fiske) had been reduced to a lot of less than one acre. The Gardner/Swan property survived longer as a working farm. Containing almost 10 acres in 1906, it was subdivided after the death of John Swan (grandson of the John Swan who bought the farm from Gardner, in 1919. (The Witherells owned the former Thompson estate.)

GARDNER/SWAN HOUSE

Meanwhile, farming continued on part of the Gardner Farm land on Cambridge Street (though not by Gardners) at the former Edward Gardner farm. Sold in 1818 to a John Swan, it was inherited by another John Swan and then his son, also named John. When the first Swan took over the property, he shipped produce using the Middlesex Canal. The Canal House stood on the farm property, used by casual employees and for the keeping of horses used on the waterway. John and his brother Stephen (who farmed at the Arlington line and lived in what is now the Winchester Country Club's house) were largely engaged in raising fruit, a speciality being the Baldwin apple, "often carrying to market from one hundred to five hundred barrels of this apple alone in a single year."¹³



The Swans were market gardeners through the early 20th century. The third John Swan retired from farming in 1914. Having a lot of farming implements he was no longer using but wanted to keep as mementoes, he set about displaying them. There not being enough room indoors, he put them, painted in bright colors to attract attention and keep them from rusting, out around the yard. "He arranged carefully, with an eye to artistic grouping, some parts of old wagons, a crane that was formerly used in the fireplace of his home, a carryall spring, steps that once graced old carriages, an old ox yoke, a water pipe from the cellar that had outlived its usefulness, some old-fashioned tug pins, a wheel gall of iron, an old whiffletree which is aged 100 years, some chains from a pair that were bought by his father just after the Civil War, and which were used in the battles of that time as army traces for artillery horses, buggy bows and hubs, and a wheel with 18 spokes that he painted red, white, and blue to show his patriotism."¹⁴

Since he never married¹⁵ and had no children or interested relations to carry on farming, the farm's life ended. After Swan he died in 1919, his heirs sold the land, and it was subdivided, similar to the Sarah and Patience Gardner property.

In 1924, Frank Patterson Smith bought the home with about 1.8 acres. Gardner Place was created

to access six planned lots. (Five house lots exist today.) He restored and renovated the old house, converted the barn into a residence (2 Gardner Place), and moved the shoe-shop wing onto a separate lot and converted that also into a house (7 Gardner Place). Dexter Blaikie, a local architect and developer, purchased another parcel of the Swan farm (to the south), and development continued. Blaikie, along with Smith, designed several houses in the Everett Avenue–Sheffield Road Historic District, transforming that portion of the old Gardner Farm into one of the finest residential districts from the turn of the 20th century.

¹ This article, copyright 2018, is a revision of an article published in the Winchester Historical Society's *Black Horse Bulletin* Vol. 15 #2, 1990. This revision supersedes all previous articles. The author once owned the Sarah and Patience Gardner House, which, if fact, prompted her first researches into Winchester history.

² "Those Mysterious Cellars," *The Winchester Record*, Vol. 1. No. 4 (Oct. 1885).

³ Henry S. Chapman, *History of Winchester*, Vol. I, p. 51.

⁴ Henry Chapman erroneously identified Samuel as the last Gardner in Winchester, overlooking Patience Gardner still living across the street when Samuel left town.

⁵ An 1825 date, however, has been put forward for the house. An owner in the latter part of the 20th century dated it to 1776.

⁶ The foundation under the present house does not match the floor plan of the house; it underlies only the front of the building. Also, the floors of the first and second stories are not all on the same level.

⁷ Hannah's first husband Ellis Viall died in 1826 after being run over by an ox wagon laden with bricks, according to the diary of John Swan quoted in *The Winchester Record*, Vol. II, No. 3, p. 457. Her second husband was about 20 years her junior. After Hannah's death, Griswold married Melissa Davenport, one of the witnesses to his wife's will.

⁸ None of the Gardner sisters had (or were survived by) children. Lucy Wyman died in Lexington in 1866. Her will mentions her three sisters but no children.

⁹ The youngest Green child, born in 1860 in Winchester, was named Alonzo Gardner Green. Whether this was due to a friendship with the Gardner sisters or to some family relationship is currently unknown.

¹⁰ The 1850 and 1850 federal censuses establish that he was on the Gardner farm.

¹¹ Edwin A. Wadleigh, *The Middlesex Journal*, Sept. 14, 1872.

¹² Tyler was a member of the first Town Hall building committee and of the School Committee, also a library trustee in whose memory the Tiffany windows at the library were donated). He was also Register of Probate for Middlesex County.

¹³ "The Baldwin Apple," *The Winchester Record*, Vol. I, No. 3, p. 184

¹⁴ "Winchester's Sentimental Farmer," *The Boston Globe*, Dec. 22, 1918.

¹⁵ "He says, although his eyesight is not what it used to be, he can see what married life is by just reading the papers and he has never seen any reason why he should get into trouble by getting married." *Boston Globe*, Dec. 22, 1918.