

Transcript From an Oral Interview with Elizabeth A. Little.

Conducted by Jo Springer, June 3, 1981, Lincoln, Mass.

The interview consisted of questions about past land uses on the Mt. Misery area. We started talking about about events in general before I started recording, so the transcript begins in our discussion of the Garfield family. The tape recorder had a belt break in the course of the interview so what follows is only a part of the interview.

EAL: In the Twin Pond Deed there is a speculation that there is a Garfield who is buying and selling land around the 1760's near Twin Pond. There is a site over there where tradition says there is a rope walk. That tradition is Dr. Harrington and he remembers somebody of Waltham telling him that they walked on it down there. But I have subsequently found someone, a woman who lives on the corner of 117 and Weston Road, which is further to the east, and she can show me the place in her yard where the rope walk was. This rope walk was there when people who are still living can remember in the 1920's or so and it was not at Twin Pond. It was near Weston Road. So the rope walk at Twin Pond must have been earlier. Here is the place where they say there is a rope walk, (pointing to a place on the map), and here is the actual place where the lady who says it was in her backyard. This is the one that got confused with this one in people's memory today. So I think there was one over there, but it was around the revolutionary war time of before it was run by Garfield.

Now, that Garfield's son moved over to Mt. Misery and

bought this land here and lived here. There are similar ditches all along here. We believe, if you read about rope walks and what they did was to ret the hemp, that these ditches were used for retting the hemp. That is to say, they let it soak in stagnant water and preferably in ditches, but they couldn't let it be in running water, because it was a terrible source of pollution. The first English conservation law was that you were not allowed to ret hemp within a certain distance of running water. So I think ~~that~~ those ditches, which run without much rhyme or reason were used around the revolutionary war period into the 1800's for retting hemp. The people who lived there, Timothy Billings had rope making tools when he died. And so it is our assumption that is why Garfield was there, to be the worker for rope production.

JES: Do you know what the ditches were used for up on the hill behind the Garfield home foundations?

EAL: Some of those ditches were probably boundary markers. Mt. Misery is interesting when you live where I do, because we are littered with stone walls. One of the things that I miss when I go over to Mt. Misery are the stone walls. There aren't any stone walls to speak of so one of the things the early American farmers did was to use ditch walls. Now, that doesn't have to be, but it is one possibility. They are up on the hill. They go along the slope of the steepest face of that hill and they are about on the boundary line of the property. The stone wall on top of Mt. Misery only divides the mountain itself and only goes for a short distance.

In terms of land use there was hemp grown in the fields. There is some very good land in here. Mt. Misery is not named

EAL: Until Henry David Thoreau call it Mt. Misery in 1860. It is rocky and was undoubtedly woodlot. The Lincoln farmers, inspite of what people say had such trouble farming these rocky hills, were not dumb. They didn't farm the rocky hills. They never tilled them. They just used them for woodlot. They had quite a lot of business. In fact, the sawmill nearby, which has been documented, and I'm sure that the wood nearby was the reason for setting this up here along the stream. Thoreau says it was cut over in 1860 and it was mentioned that this is a woodlot. Futhermore, the people were clearly living here on the road. In other words, the river was nothing to them, instead of fronting on the river, there were fronting on the road. There was a school house here, which was called Billings' End. There is reference at the Codman House known as the Codman papers to about 1786, when Dr. Russell left town the night of the Battle of Concord. He was a Tory and his estate was confiscated by the state. Everything was recorded for the state, because there was big money for the state. One of the things they paid for were some planks from the miller. The miller at the time was William Fillis. William Fillis was the freed slave of one of the Billings. I suspect that he ran the mill and that they hired a specialist to give him a hand.