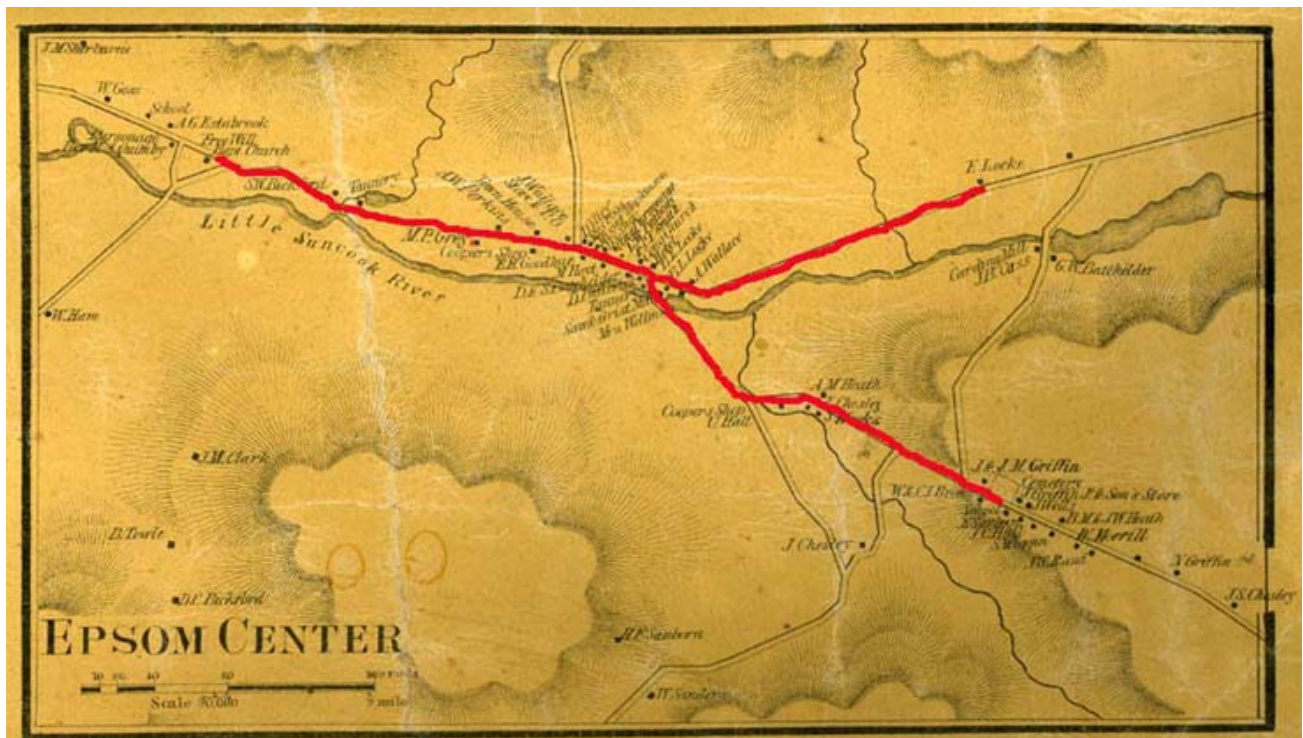


HISTORY OF THE McCLARY CEMETERY and the early settlement of Epsom Center

Program for the Epsom Historical Association, Sept. 24, 2006

It was April 15th, 1855, and the temperature went above freezing making the roads very muddy with the run-off of the huge snow drifts still piled high along the highway. It was four and a half hours to make the journey from Stafford, through Northwood, to Epsom with the wagon, horse, a large heavy trunk and two passengers. On board were the Reverend Enoch Hayes Place and his son David Marks Place, the Reverend having been summoned to Epsom to help in attending the funeral services of a prominent town citizen. They reached the house of Ephraim Locke Jr. where they put up for the night and final touches for his part of the services were undoubtedly worked on. It was one of two partings the Reverend would take part in the next day.



The route by the funeral through Slab City to the Free Will Church and up to the McClary Cemetery

The morning was likely hectic, but it was not long before the Reverend was at the home of the deceased, Deacon Ephraim Locke Sr., and there began to comfort the widow. A procession was formed under the supervision of General Benjamin L. Locke, and the slow trip to the Free Will Baptist Church began. As it passed General Locke's tavern (later Knowles's store), it stopped briefly so the Reverend's son David could wait for the stage to begin his trip to Boston to seek his fortune. Reverend Place said his goodbyes, and the procession continued to the services.

The twenty-year-old church was filled to capacity with additional chairs being brought into the aisles. The service was rather unique. Pallbearers included two Congregational Ministers and two free will ministers. With the services concluded, the body was moved a mile and a half to the cemetery in the old village and laid to rest. The site of the old village and cemetery must have been most reverent that day. Snow covering the ground revealed only the upper portions and tops of the many grave and field stones; and the empty space where only 5 years earlier the old meeting house once stood, must of still looked odd to many of the

participants. The Deacon, who was born in 1783, saw many such changes in Epsom, and was instrumental in much of it. He, like the many people gathered there to say farewell, had to have knowledge of those earlier times.



There are only a few histories written about those early times. The first was in 1823 by Rev. Jonathan Curtis. The next did not appear until about 1886 and was written by John Dolbeer, and remains the most extensive history to date. John Mark Moses wrote several articles about the early settlers, and another titled “The First Church of Epsom.” A few years later, for the Bicentennial, Loella Bunker wrote the ‘Historical Sketch of Epsom, NH.’ In more recent times, shorter papers were written for presentations to meetings of the Historical Association by such towns’ people as Gilbert Knowles, and the volumes of Epsom History compiled by Phil Yeaton. Monuments located in several places here on Center Hill were the work of the Epsom Centre Historical club and the Epsom Women’s club. Most of these histories are based on the old town records, now residing at the NH Archives in Concord; the early Church Records residing at the NH Historical Society; and assorted papers, some of personal recollections written by local residents throughout the years, including those of George H. Yeaton. Even with all of this, no accurate portrayal of the early town

exists – and though many of the early histories hint at some information that could shed light on what the early town center looked like, they either omitted it, or did not follow up to make a more complete view. George H. Yeaton began to suspect this was the case, questioning some of the early views about this specific spot, the McClary Cemetery and town center. Using all the aforementioned information, including a re-reading of the old town records, and researching deeds, at least a slightly more accurate account and picture of the early settlement emerges. By no means the definitive history, as too much early history is lost forever, the following description and presentation is offered.

The town was incorporated in 1727 to the inhabitants of Newcastle, Greenland and the Parish of Rye. Just about a year prior to the incorporation, the Parish of Rye was established, being before that a portion of Newcastle. Committees were formed to survey the town, and to establish lots, their size depending on the rate of tax that the residents of the three towns had paid in 1723. The early proprietors also were to include in the survey 20 home lots, which were to be settled within four years, and locations for a house of worship, parsonage, and a school. All this was dependent upon peace with the Indians, with an extension of an additional four years to be added if hostilities broke out. The survey having been completed, a committee was formed to layout the town center at a meeting held in Rye in January of 1729. Failure of members of the town to contribute their share to the expense of laying out the town delayed its happening until 1732, with 30 additional acres being added in the town to those who would draw for the 20 original home lots. In June of that year, the lots were drawn and a town book was bought in which to enter the records. In the fall the town was divided into four ranges and voted that there be built a meeting-house of thirty foot long and twenty-four feet wide, immediately built at the charge of the Proprietors, and that Mr. Joshua Brackett, Mr. William Lock & Theodore Atkinson, Esq., be a committee to agree for the same with any person or persons shall do it soonest and cheapest. Two months later, November 9, 1732, the residents of the three towns drew for their lots, 128 in all.

It had to be a busy time. Twenty people had to settle the home lots, land had to be cleared, a road built, and a meetinghouse had to be erected. William Locke was paid thirty-seven pounds five shillings for building the

meetinghouse as per his receipts, and the new road from the meetinghouse downward to Nottingham was named East Street. Town officers were elected, and many of the inhabitants of Newcastle, Greenland and Rye began to check out their new properties. In so doing, Charles McCoy was already discovered living in town. A former resident of Londonderry and Chester, he had made his way into the bounds of Epsom, settled and was raising a family. As he was not a resident of the three towns who drew for lots, he was warned out of town by constable Paul Chapman. McCoy later purchased land on Sanborn's hill and remained one of the town's early, if not earliest, settlers.

With the meetinghouse and East Street in place by 1733, the 20 home lots began to be inhabited; the proprietors divided land in the four ranges among the 128 people who drew lots. The proprietors of Canterbury were given permission to lay out a road through the town, and things appeared to be underway to establish the new town. Land was purchased and sold, much of it without record. The McClary's had a blockhouse built by 1736 and a sawmill was established. It is known that by 1740 that George Wallace, Andrew McClary, Charles McCoy, William Blake and Samuel Blake were settled in town. John Blake had a son William born in Epsom, March 31, 1741, said to be the first white male born in town – though his obituary recently found, says he was the second¹. A proprietors meeting was held at the meetinghouse May 4, 1743, and was quickly adjourned to the second Wednesday in June. In 1744, Canterbury was looking to build a bridge on their road over the Suncook River.

Things however were not running smoothly. Some people were to be prosecuted for trespass, illegally acquiring land; there was a lawsuit pending against a Capt. Joseph Locke and the proprietors; on June the 8th 1743, Deacon William Lock & John Dolbeer appeared at the annual meeting in Epsom and made a demand in behalf of those persons that have been deprived their rights in Epsom. For several years the proprietors voted to raise money for a minister, but none was hired. A petition to the legislature produced an act by them for additional powers to raise money 'that they were not Enabled to proceed in the Settlement of their Township so Effectually as they might do for want of sufficient powers' for the next five years. This did not help as the Indian Wars virtually halted progress.

The various town histories tell the tales of Sergt. Blakes friendly encounters with the Indians and the capture of Charles McCoy's wife Isabella. McCoy petitioned the Governor for aid, and 27 men were sent to scout for the Indians, but they were not found. The town garrison on the day of the abduction was empty, what residents were around were already at Nottingham, including the younger McCoy children. The Indian threat was far less in the winter than in the warmer months. From 1744 to 1750 the scant population may have only spent short periods of time in town. It is known that the McClary's were living back in Nottingham during the summer of 1744, and other families certainly could have followed suit. Proprietors meetings from 1744 through 1750 were held out of town.

Indeed after the capture of Isabella McCoy it may have been that only four families were present²: McCoy's, Captain McClary's, George Wallace's, and Lieutenant Blake's. The Indians made sporadic visits after her capture, at one time killing one ox in each yoke, and cutting out the tongues of the others. The four ox teams in town were those of the families just mentioned.



Isabella McCoy
Monument

The proprietor's meeting held in Rye in 1750 formed a committee to check the progress and see if the owners of the home lots had 'fulfilled according to the Charter and agreement.' There is no record of the



report, but it couldn't have been very uplifting. The majority of the next decades annual meetings of the proprietors where held at 'the home of Andrew McClary, Inn keeper. What fate met the first meetinghouse is not known – it must have been a fairly crude structure that fell into disrepair, or perhaps became a casualty of the Indian war, in any event, it seems to have disappeared during this time. There is little in the way of minutes during that period, but it is known that in 1751, it was again discussed to raise money for the teaching of the gospel. This had

to be a period of some growth, and new families arrived, such as the Marden's, Barton's and Libbey's – but the names of the selectmen during this time period still reflect the earliest settlers – McClary's and Blakes. By 1761 there were 22 dwelling houses, 77 acres of improved and pasture land, 19 horses, 57 cows and 40 oxen. At this same time were operating one grist mill and one saw mill – two things which probably contributed much to the growth of the town during the decade of the 1750's and beyond. Still, there was no school and no minister – and the first meetinghouse had not been replaced. Money was tight, as the majority of the town was in the hands of non-residents, and the burden to build town structures could not be sustained by the 36 inhabitants. The legislature came to their aid and gave them extra taxing power for the next five years.

June of 1761, the proprietors voted to build a house for a minister if the Reverend John Tucke accepted the call – and to find a site for a meetinghouse. Tucke did accept the call, and for whatever reason, bought the land and built his own house. The town in August of that same year voted "that the meetinghouse shall stand on the same lot where the old meetinghouse formerly stood, at or near the Burying place". This one line in the old town books is of real significance. This line appears in almost every early history of the town, yet none of them acknowledged that this would be the second meetinghouse constructed, contrary to the plaque erected here on the site proclaiming it the first. The line also is the first mention of a central cemetery at Epsom center. Money was again an issue, and the actual erecting of a new meetinghouse was delayed. It also would indicate that the burying place may have been used for some time. It has been generally accepted that the first burial there was in 1761 on the reported death of William Blazo, but this one burial would not necessarily constitute a cemetery, and as the site was used by the town since the first meetinghouse was erected there, it would seem very likely that there would have been additional burials before 1761. There is no record of deaths prior to that time, so it remains speculation.



Rev. Tuck's home, later known as the old tavern

The following petition was sent to the Governor, and contained a list of the signers, giving us a good indication who the residents were at the time.

1762, June 24 - Citizens of the town petition the Governor to restore previous years taxes as they are 'not able to build a meetinghouse; that our Minister is obliged to Preach in some of our Dwelling houses - John McClary, George Wallace, Nathan Marden, John Blake, Ephraim Locke, Reuben Sanborn Jr., Eliphalet Sanborn, Reuben Sanborn, James Wood, Abraham Libbey, Abraham Wallace, Benjamin Blake, Thomas Blake, Isaac Libbey, Isaac Libbey Jr., Reuben Libbey, Amos Blazo, Samuel Bickford, Samuel Blake, Thomas Haines, John Blazo, Ephraim Berry, William Blake, Benson Ham, John McGaffey, Andrew McClary, Abner Evans.

The list of names gives us a pretty good indication that the main population remained on Center Hill, and stretched down towards Slab City and Black Hall Road. Finally, in April of 1764, a few years after Rev. Tucke was hired and preached in private homes, it was finally voted that a meetinghouse to be built in Epsom, the length fifty feet and the breadth forty feet. By the fall of the next year, the church records indicate that the new meetinghouse was finally in use. In June of 1765 the location for a school was decided, using the school lot across from the meetinghouse, and the project was put out to auction and bid off to Ensign McGaffey. By April of 1766, the school had been constructed, and the beginnings of a true town center were well underway. May 1, 1769, in a meeting at the schoolhouse 'voted that the Burying ground be fenced in order to defend it from being exposed'. Though voted, it does not appear as though it was fenced at that time.

There is no document or illustration that shows the exact location of the meetinghouse. We are fortunate that Mary L. Cass delivered an address at the 1901 Old Home Day gathering, and that text remains. It is in this description that we learn something about the structure.

It was a large square building with three outside doors – one facing the South, the front door; one on the East and another on the West; each of these doors entered directly into the meeting room; no entries or halls.

A walk or aisle led directly from the front door to the pulpit stairs. There were several steps up into the pulpit, which was enclosed by a partition so high that when the minister was sitting down he could not be seen by anyone upon the floor.

Over the pulpit was the sounding board, as it was called; a sort of canopy attached to the ceiling by a slender rod.

There was a large gallery upon three sides, which was reached by two flights of stairs. A row of pews was built against the wall, while in front of the gallery over the front door and opposite the pulpit were the singer's seats.

Upon the East side of the gallery was a long seat where the young women and girls sat, called the girls seat and upon the West side was the boys seat.

There were no conveniences for a fire in the old meetinghouse and in the Winter the services were held in the vestry where there was a fire.

The young women and girls usually went out for a stroll in the graveyard just back of the church if the weather was favorable and then over to squire Merrill's shed to get a drink of cold water from the deep well.

The older men usually remained in the house but the younger men and boys took their dinners out doors and either on the doorsteps or out on the common in groups, ate their lunch and enjoyed themselves.

In researching deeds for this area, none of them ever mention the meetinghouse or the lot for bounds. They do, however, sometimes mention the burial ground. Using Mary Cass's description as a guide, it would appear you could walk out the door immediately into the graveyard. Though the bounds of the cemetery have changed somewhat over the years by fences and roads, it would indicate that the structure was within the bounds of the burying ground itself. This would be a common practice to have old graves surrounding an old meetinghouse, and was the case here. Once the building was removed, certainly some of the stones were rearranged to fill some of that space, and new ones likely added.

The town held its annual meetings sometimes at the meetinghouse and sometimes at the schoolhouse, and continued to vote money for both. The census of 1773 gives a good indication of the population and how it had grown from 36 polls just 13 years earlier.³

	Unmarried Men from 16 to 60	18
Married Men from 16 to 60		53
Boys 16 years and younger		86
Men 60 years and upwards		1
Females unmarried		109
Females Married		53
Widows		4
Male Slaves		1
Female Slaves		1
	TOTAL	327

The relationship between Rev. Tuck and some members of the town became strained, and he was dismissed by vote in June of 1774 and it was voted that the Meetinghouse shall be shut up till the town sees course to open the said house again.. No immediate successor was named, and using the meetinghouse for its annual meetings, the town set about storing arms in the event of revolution, and building roads for the rapid expansion of the town. The militia of the town answered the call to arms following Concord and Lexington, and Andrew McClary and William McCrillis died at Bunker Hill; Andrew McGaffey and Weymouth Wallace, wounded. Rev. Tuck remained with his family in Epsom following his being dismissed, living at his home, what was later known as the old tavern. He left to serve as a Revolutionary chaplain when struck by illness and died in route to Albany in February of 1777. The town, focused on the war and low of funds, refused funding for a new pastor and for furthering education in 1775. In 1779 a petition was filed to call a meeting "to determine what they shall do respecting a difference subsisting (?) between Col. McClary, Dea. Marden & Deacon Wallace and any others that may be concerned with them - & the town concerning the shutting up of the meeting house after the dismissal of the late Rev. Mr. Tucke and what proposal the town will make in order to a reconciliation" – all in part to prepare to hire a new minister. The matter was left to be settled 'among men', no minister was hired, and the school not supported. It was not until 1784 that Rev. Ebenezer Hazeltine accepted a call to come to Epsom to preach, and along with it came a new parsonage, the land being taken off the present school lot. The office of sexton was added so that there was a caretaker of the meetinghouse key and in 1786 there was in the warrant an article 'to repair the meetinghouse windows and finish the inside of said house immediately'. The job of sexton was further defined in 1788 to 'the care of the meetinghouse key, christening basin, sweeping the meetinghouse once a month and shoveling the snow from the doors of the Meetinghouse.' March 21, 1787, at the annual meeting it was 'voted bid out the building of the Burying ground fence at public vendue to the lowest bidder and should there be



The original parsonage built for Rev. Ebenezer Hazeltine and later bought by Rev. Jonathan Curtis.

undertaken neglect to perform the Selectmen shall proceed to build said fence at the expense of the person who bid off the same. Bid off to Francis Lock to be done by the last day of June next. It would appear to have not been built, as in August of 1791, in the town warrant for that year, it asks to fence the burying yard in Epsom with stone wall and that said be built 2 ½ feet thick at the bottom and 4 feet high and Voted the said burying yard be 15 rods in front and eleven rods back. It was defeated. March 13, 1810, 'voted that the Selectmen be and they are hereby authorized and directed to repair and build a

decent fence around the burying yard the present year.'

Also of note is that in 1790 Francis Locke was elected pound keeper, the pound having been built near the schoolhouse and parsonage. In 1795 it was voted that any person or persons may move the pound in Epsom further back on the parsonage lot so that the front thereof may stand parallel with the wall back of the school house, provided it be placed and underpinned as well as it is now and without any expense to the town. This area now includes the cemetery, meetinghouse, parsonage, schoolhouse, town pound, and the common. In 1808 the pound was moved to Slab City by a warrant article and gave the following description - To see what method the town will adopt to erect a pound for the use of said town. Voted that a pound be erected on Capt. Samuel Locke's land near the house Reuben Locke lately occupied on the turnpike road; that the pound for the use of the town be built of stone, thirty feet square within side at the bottom and four feet thick at the bottom; and two feet at the top, and six feet high of stone with a cap of yellow pine 8 inches by 10 inches free of sap.

On November 10, 1813, the Reverend Ebenezer Hazeltine died, and was buried in the McClary cemetery. Prior to his death, dissention in town started to develop over those citizens who patronized other churches, and still were required to pay tax to support the church in Epsom. David Dickey stated that he still belonged to a church in Chester, though he had not lived there many years, and he was still required to pay the tax. The records show letters to the selectmen of Epsom people who joined the Free Will Church in Pittsfield, including Sylvanus Moses, Richard Rand, Jonathan Knowles, Samuel Hutchings, Samuel Locke, Simeon Locke, and John Page. Following the death of Rev. Hazeltine, the town was asked to accept Jonathan Curtis as the new minister. It was defeated, and as a consequence, the Congregational Society of Epsom was formed, and it hired Reverend Curtis, and he accepts in January of 1815. He preached at the meetinghouse, but the influence of other religions continued to increase, and the Congregationalists found themselves meeting more often in the schoolhouse than the meetinghouse, which was being supplied with ministers of other faiths on a regular basis. The Congregationalists built their own new building near the old home of Rev. Tuck, then belonging to Simon Ames Heath, and called the vestry. It was first used July 29th, 1821. It was used for winter services and was a little more comfortable as it had a stove. The lower story was used as horse sheds and we are told that the horses shivered down below while the worshippers shivered in the room above.⁴





Porstmouth Journal, December 22, 1821 – In Epsom, John McClary Esq. aged 37, son of Michael McClary, Marshal of this District. The deceased was killed, almost instantly, by the fall of a piece of timber from the frame of a shed under which he was standing. From his earliest youth he possessed in a remarkable degree the affection of his friends, and the confidence of his fellow-citizens. He was repeatedly elected a representative from his native town in the Legislature of this State, and two years ago he was chosen a Senator, by the fourth district. The kindness of his manners, the frankness of his temper, and the uprightness of his conduct will not soon be effaced from the memory of those who knew him.

Honorable John McClary is buried in the McClary Cemetery, the funeral by Rev. Jonathan Curtis, the text of which is in the holdings of the NH Historical Society.

The town and the Congregational Society have differences to settle. The Society owns the pews in the meetinghouse, yet they seldom meet there. The parsonage is sold to the Reverend Mr. Curtis, and a fund from its sale is split between the different religious affiliations. Besides all of this, there is trouble brewing amongst the Congregationalists themselves. Arthur Caverno, a teacher in town, organizes the ‘free willers’ and they officially become the Epsom Free Will Baptist Church. By March of 1824, the problems within the Congregational Society reached their peak. It started with the death of Cato Fisk, a man of color who worked the toll road gate. The story is related to us in a letter from Enoch Eastman to the Suncook Valley Times, to which he witnessed first hand.

“Soon after this the patriarch Cato went dead, and was quietly buried in the graveyard back of the meetinghouse, where he and the Rev. Mr. Hazelton still repose, without a chiseled slab to tell of the spot.

The next week Gen. McClary died, the funeral service was held in the old meetinghouse. People came from afar. Large delegations from Concord and Pittsfield were there. Mr. Curtis preached the funeral sermon from the singular text “Without any order.” I was but a boy, scarcely in my teens, but I remember it well. The thread of the discourse was that all without any order go to the grave; the rich, the poor; the young, the old, the high, the low.

“The grave is the common lot of all. All go down on one common level in the grave. Last week the poor African, to-day Gen. McClary.” And as he came near the close, the speaker said it was customary to extol the dead, but he could not do so. “You all knew the deceased. If I should speak of his patriotism you all know that. Should I tell you he was at the battle of Bunker Hill, so also was the poor African who died last week He closed by reading that beautiful hymn of Dr. Watts, two lines of which ran thus: The true, the wise, the reverend head Must lie as low as ours.

Probably no funeral sermon in New Hampshire ever created such an excitement. The Concord people said they guessed the speaker remembered the Turkey, and I expect he did.

The result was, figuratively speaking, that Gen. McClary rolled over in his coffin. A division soon sprang up in the church and society, and Mr. Curtis soon after left Epsom and went to Hanover in Mass., and from there to Pittsfield.”

On January 1st of 1825, the Reverend Mr. Jonathan Curtis was dismissed. He continued to live at the parsonage with his family and father. His father passed away July 11, 1826, he was a Lieutenant, and early engaged in the revolutionary struggle for liberty – was one of the minutemen, and of the army that invested Boston after the battle of Lexington. He is buried in the McClary Cemetery.⁵

In Lowell, MA, November 23rd, Mrs. Martha Jenness, aged 27, wife of Mr. Jonathan Jenness, formerly of Rye, and daughter of Mr. Daniel Philbrick (Jr.) of Epsom, having endured a pulmonary disease of about nine years (died). About two years since she became a member of the Free Baptist Church in Epsom; but Providence saw fit to dismiss her from her membership there by her death, and we trust to unite her with the Church triumphant in heaven. During her confinement she would often express a desire to go hence and be with Christ, which was far better than to be here – yet sometimes fearful would offend by being too anxious for her departure. She has left a large circle of friends and acquaintance to mourn their loss; but they mourn not as those who have no hope of the welfare of their departed relatives. She gave a consoling evidence to her friends and those who visited her occasionally, that her work was done and well done.¹⁰

Her body was brought back from Lowell to her father's in Epsom for burial here at the old burying place and marked with a simple engraved fieldstone.



*The Congregational Meeting house dedicated
January 1, 1846*

Things did not change much for the next decade. The Congregationalists were meeting occasionally in the meetinghouse and in their vestry. The Free Will Baptists continued to grow, and by September of 1834, built and were meeting in their new facility near the entrance of Black Hall Road and the turnpike. This allowed the Congregational Society back into the meetinghouse on a regular basis.

Another decade passed, and the Congregational Society finally relinquished its use of the vestry and the meetinghouse in favor of its new meetinghouse in Slab City on land given them by Robert Knox. They dedicated their new facility January 1, 1846. This left use

of the meetinghouse for town purposes only, and it must of begun to fall in disrepair. Mary L. Cass in her description mentions that the entire building was devoid of paint inside and out. The town voted in 1796 ‘that the outside of the meetinghouse be repaired by clapboarding and shingling the present season.’ In 1816 they voted that the Selectmen are authorized and empowered to make sale of the privilege for pews at public auction in conformity to a vote of the town passed the 25th day of December last and appropriate the money for repairing the meetinghouse and that same year at the meetinghouse, there was this in the warrant: To see if the town will authorize the erection or building of porches and a steeple of cupola to the meetinghouse in Epsom. It was voted that this article be dismissed. In 1825 Jonathan A. Knowles proposed a new town meetinghouse be built, and it was rejected. Whether there were further repairs is unknown as there are few town records during this period. Twenty-five years after Jonathan A. Knowles proposed a new town meetinghouse, he is paid for the construction of just such a building, which is the old town hall, which stands today. The proprietors of the Congregational Society put the old meetinghouse up for auction September 8th, 1849 – the ad read⁶:

AUCTION

AUCTION.

Will be sold at Public Auction, on Saturday, the 8th day of September next, at four o'clock P. M., on the premises, the old Congregational meeting house in Epsom. The building is about 50 feet by 40; the timber in the frame is large and with the rest of the wood work is believed to be sound and good.

Conditions at time and place of sale.

FREDERICK SANBORN, } Committee
MOSES P. GRAY, } of the
JONATHAN L. CILLEY, } Proprietors.
Epsom, Aug. 20, 1849. 3d

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Committee of the Proprietors
Epsom, Aug. 20. 1849*

The Epsom town report for the year 1850 in their fiscal year report states "Towns proportion of sale of Meeting House 1.80."

'Deacon Locke was born in Epsom July 15, 1783. He always resided in Epsom. He died April 14, aged 71 years, 9 months. Forty two years ago he gave his heart to God. 41 years since he was baptized by Elder Ebenezer Knowlton & united with the Freewill Baptist Church in Pittsfield, some over 20 or 30 years since a Freewill Baptist Church was organized in Epsom. He was one of that number, and was appointed to serve as a Deacon. He possessed a great gift of exhortation, and has been instrumental of several revivals, some of which were extensive. He was a man of faith and much prayer. His house has long been one noted for hospitality, where the ministers of the gospel found a resting place, and the poor and needy, one who felt their sufferings. He left one son and three daughters, 7 grandchildren, 1 brother, and 1 sister.

At the time of his decease he was living with his third wife, a most pious and worthy woman 15 ½ years younger than himself. But the manner of his sudden exit, has cast a gloom over the hearts of thousands!

For some weeks before his death he had been afflicted with a liver complaint, of the spleen character; which made him low-spirited, and often much affrighted in his sleep, and at times showed signs of mental alienation.

On Friday evening 13 inst. [inst. – instant, in the present month] he prayed fervently in his barn. During the evening he sang one stanza of his favorite evening hymn. His wife prayed in the family, or with her husband, no other persons being in the house. The Deacon, complaining of hill health, retired earlier than usual. Some three o'clock the next morning he awoke in a fright, supposing that he was surrounded with many enemies that were seeking his destruction.



The efforts of his wife seemed to calm his mind for a short time. He finally told her not to worry about him for he would not hurt himself, or any one else.

But when the next paroxysm came on, he leaped out of bed, and in going less than 20 feet from his bed he reached a well in his shed 4 ½ feet from the door step, into which he went with velocity; his good wife pursuing him, but not near enough to get hold of him and thereby prevent the fatal deed.

His son and others were soon at the fatal well, and found his body on the surface of the water, which was 15 feet deep below him. But the vital spark had fled.’⁷

Deacon Ephraim Locke was buried in the McClary Cemetery.



A hearse of the period

Funerals got a different look when the town bought a hearse in 1889. It was built by George Worthington, and was described as ‘custom made, of the best white ash and bass lumber, with hickory wheels. It is ironed with the best iron and steel. The glass, very thick and strong. All the material is of the best quality, and the workmanship is first class.’⁸ It was repaired and upgraded in 1894. The hearse was often leased out for additional funds.

There appears to be gaps in the years in which the town printed annual town reports. There are a few starting with 1848, and did not seem to become regular until about 1878. Sometime prior to 1872, the McClary Cemetery Corporation of Epsom was formed and bought land of Hiram Holmes of 1 ¼ acres beginning at the south west corner of the town burial ground. A year and a half later it was sold back to Hiram Holmes with the provision that said Holmes ‘to keep it fenced and to be used for no other purpose than a Cemetery’. A year later he sold the one undivided two thirds of the cemetery to Henry Knox and Horace Bickford, making the three equal partners. There is no mention in town reports of when the tomb/vault was built. There is an entry in the 1906 town report when Holmes built the vault at the Short Falls Cemetery, and it could be surmised that the one at the McClary Cemetery was built about the same time. It is also possible that the money for the vault went through the McClary Cemetery Corporation. The three men sold cemetery plots, and it would appear that they continued to do so until 1903, the first year in which a Cemetery Trustee’s report appears in an annual town report. It was that year that by warrant the town voted to accept the offer made by the undersigned to convey the unoccupied and unsold portions of said McClary Cemetery to said Town of Epsom upon the terms and subject to the reservations set forth by Horace Bickford, Hiram A. Holmes, both of Epsom; Caroline Knox of Rye, widow of Henry Knox; and Fred P. Knox of Epping; and Cyrus H. Knox of Fitchburg, Mass, for and in consideration of the sum of one dollar.⁹ The land began at the southwest corner of the Town Burial Ground; the newer portion the town was buying was called the McClary Cemetery, the name used since 1870 when the corporation was formed. The town did consider money for improvements to the town burial ground in 1894, and since the vote of 1903, the old burying ground and the newer addition became one, the McClary Cemetery as we call it today. The first trust fund appears in the town treasurer’s report for the year ending 1894 as the S.M. Chesley Estate in trust for \$50.00. This was probably for perpetual care and for probably Samuel Morrill Chesley 1809-1891. There is no record of his death as being in Epsom and no stone or marker in the





cemetery, though his parents are; John and Elizabeth Blake Chesley. Those who early on started such trust funds were J.A. Clough and John L. Brackett. A large gift of \$2500.00 was left by Mary Evans and accepted by the town in 1919, for the erection of an iron fence to replace the existing stone fence on the south side of the McClary Cemetery. In 1922 the stonewall was taken down and the new fencing installed and at the same time eighteen loads of loam was added at the new part of McClary cemetery, that which area which formerly belonged to Hiram A. Holmes. The next year a stonewall was built on the east side of the cemetery through donations of

money and services. These operations were major changes to the cemetery, and though they may have been improvements at the time, they seemed to have adversely affected some of its historic content. Gilbert Knowles in his church history addresses just that:

In one of Mr. [John Mark] Moses' articles in 1910 I found the following:

The cemetery in the rear contains many hundred graves. At least two hundred and fifty may be counted that are marked with only common fieldstones, uninscribed. One cannot now count 250 graves marked only with fieldstones because along about 1920, when the south wall was taken down and replaced with the iron fence given in the will of Mary A. Evans, the cemetery trustees removed a great many of the uninscribed fieldstones. This was done to make the mowing and general care of the old part of the cemetery easier. Being uninscribed there was no way to tell the names of the persons in the graves; yet the stones had meant something to certain people in the earlier days. Almost all the graves before 1800 were marked with uninscribed fieldstones, and likely quite a lot of those who died after 1800.

Comparing the Dolbeer list of Epsom deaths against known burials certainly gives credence that there are easily 100 deaths occurring in town from the Revolutionary to the Civil Wars, for which no grave or marker is known.

There were about 70 cemetery plots in the first extension to the original old burying ground. One of the last was sold in 1927 to Edward Demers. Near the same time that Hiram A. Holmes sold this land to the McClary Cemetery Corporation, he sold adjoining land to Daniel Clough. This property was passed to his daughter, Rosilla Clough Heath, a strong promoter of the Centre Historic Club, and then to her daughter Estelle Heath who married Roland Hall. In 1927 the town was asked to purchase this land in the form of 60 20x20 foot cemetery lots with an option for an additional 30 lots at the rate of \$10.00 each when they wished to purchase them, along with the right to build a wall on the northerly line of this tract of land. This is the portion of the cemetery used today. There was a warrant article in 1931 to see what action the town would take in regard to having the McClary Cemetery incorporated. The result of that vote has not been ascertained, nor has the time when the McClary Cemetery Corporation ceased to function and what its arrangement was with the town in regard to the care and upkeep of the cemetery.



The water system in the cemetery was a gift accepted by the town by warrant in 1935. The electric water system was the gift of John W. Cox as a memorial to the late Joseph Lawrence and Eva L. Cox, this included the stone building by the west side entrance. An additional gift of \$2500.00 was contained in the warrant articles of 1960 as income to be used for the upkeep and maintenance of the Lawrence and Cox Water Supply Unit.

The area known as the center by this time has significantly changed. The town pound had been abandoned early on; the parsonage had been privately owned since the time of Rev. Curtis; the meetinghouse sold and likely moved to Concord; the stately house of John C. Hall near the old common burned; the former house of David Morrill, later governor of New Hampshire and also located near the common, had long since disappeared. Many of us remember in our time when the old tavern, the former home of Rev. Tuck burned to the ground. What became of the Congregational vestry is unknown. All that remains today are this valued old cemetery and the schoolhouse across the street.

Changes occurred as well within these walls. The grave of the Honorable John McClary and members of his family were likely moved and reset later in cement. The same happened with the descendants of the Honorable Josiah Sanborn. Old stones were taken down and replaced with larger monuments, such as with some of the Cates – and in fact, these events sometimes made the news, as with this account about Charles Sumner Hall:

‘Charles Hall has erected a monument over his father’s grave.’¹¹ The larger stone included other family members, and the stones he replaced, to this day, lie behind the barn of the Gossville Hotel, which he formerly owned.



There are no doubts that around the old meetinghouse there were hundreds of burials of the pioneers of Epsom. There is no known resting place of the immigrant Andrew McClary, or for the early Deacons Wallace and Marden. The first female born in Epsom about 1730, Mary McCoy, died a virtual pauper with no resting place of note. Epsom’s military hero Andrew McClary finally has a marker to his credit, but other Revolutionary War veterans – Thomas Babb, John Batchelder, Samuel Bickford, Benson Ham, Moses Locke, Jethro Pettingill, George Berry Sanders, Ebenezer Wallace, and James Wood remain anonymous. They are however, represented by the Unknown Soldiers Plot, donated in 1938 by Elizabeth McClary Cass Bixby.



There are those Revolutionary Soldiers who do have a presence here. James Gray, an early teacher in town who came to hold many offices of trust in this community; John Ham; Francis Locke, one of several of the same given and surname buried in this ground; Capt. Samuel Locke, tavern holder; Michael McClary, Adjutant General for New Hampshire; William McCrillis; Peter Pomp, a man of color who served with Michael McClary and died at Valley Forge, whose stone appears to be a government marker and placed in his honor here by persons still unknown; Eliphalet Sanborn, also a veteran of the Indian Wars; Seth Bartlett; the minuteman Jonathan Curtis; Ephraim Locke, buried beside his son Ephraim Locke Jr. who died



*The grave of Civil War Veteran
Andrew J. Hall complete with
'perpetual care' marker*

at age 10 in 1771 and has the oldest inscribed fieldstone in this cemetery; and Mark Emerson, a fifer, whose Government style marker displays his service record, but the birth and death dates are those of his father of the same name.

There are here buried and honored by the same stone, Benjamin Moody Esquire, who died in February 1820 and his 19 year old son who died at sea that same year. The same scenario on the stone of Capt. James Gray, sharing a marker with that of his son Theodore Parson Gray, who died at sea in 1796, age 15. Young John McClary Steele, who at age seven, died playing around an ox cart, being crushed by its heavy tongue.

The War of 1812 is represented by the bravery of John Grant, Capt. John Ham and Perkins Philbrick.

The Civil War soldiers here interred include: Corp. Elbridge Batchelder, Lt. Charles J. Brown, whose personal diaries of the period still survive; Corp. John H. Goodhue; John S. Griffin; Charles Henry Hall; George W. Ham; George H. Hoyt, for whom the local GAR was named; Daniel N. Lewis; William S. Morrill; Joel L. Sanborn; Sargent George Bixby, whose prison life is documented in the GAR memoirs book; John T. Buzzell; Andrew J. Hall, whose diary of the war resides in the special collections of UNH, with a copy now with the Historical Association; Daniel H. Hall; Albert J. Hoyt; Josiah D. Langley; Capt. Arthur C. Locke, his surviving tintype photo stereotypic of the period; A. L. Sanborn and John Cate.

Of all the early ministers, only Ebenezer Hazeltine remains here. Jonathan Ayer Knowles of Epsom built the newer town house in 1850, later became a minister, and lies here for eternity. There are of course many more personalities and stories to be told of those buried here.

This is a place not only for reverence for those whose remains are here, but for the history and memory of their many contributions to us – their descendants and caretakers of the town they themselves once cherished and served. For simply that, we have an obligation to keep this place the best we can. Every year there are ever more old stones fallen over; more that deteriorate to dust, and those the elements have begun to deface and wear into oblivion. The old tree, which made this place so picturesque, struck by lightning not that long ago, has not been replaced to return to this cemetery the shade and solitude it once offered. What is owed this place is much, what it represents can never be adequately expressed. What deeds future generations and we do to dedicate ourselves towards making this sacred place a significant and prominent part of our culture and heritage, will determine its fate and our own legacy in the history of Epsom.

- 1 – Obituary of 3-28-1829
- 2 – Curtis History
- 3 – NH State Papers
- 4 – Historical Sketch – Loella Bunker
- 5 – Obituary of 7-31-1826
- 6 – NH Patriot newspaper 8-23-1849
- 7 – Journal of Enoch Hayes Place
- 8 – 1890 Epsom Town Report
- 9 – Merrimack County Deeds 344-579
- 10- Obituary of 1-1-1827
- 11 – Epsom News June 13, 1896