

MANSION HOUSE OF WENTWORTH CHESWILL

By Nellie Palmer George

Wentworth Cheswill, the son of Hopestill and Catherine Cheswill, was born in Newmarket, 1746, and here he lived more than three score years and ten, and died lamented, on the 8th day of March, 1817. He was educated at Dummer Academy, Byfield, Mass., then as now considered a good school for boys.

He was appointed Justice of the Peace when he was twenty-two years of age. About this time he was executor of the estate of Deacon Joseph Judkins. In town affairs he was always active. He held the esteem and confidence of his fellow townsmen. He executed deeds, wills and other legal papers and acted as judge in the trial of causes.

As citizen, judge and soldier he stands prominent in the history of Newmarket. He was selectman in 1783, '85 and '95; assessor 1784, '86, '87, '91, '97 and '99; auditor 1786, '99, 1801, '04, '12, '14 and '16; coroner 1786, '87; representative 1801; moderator 1801, '04, '07, '09, '11, '13 and '16. In church affairs he was active. He signed the association test July 12, 1776.

In the important town meeting, held in Newmarket October 20, 1775, it was voted to send thirty men to Portsmouth, under command of Lieut. James Hill. At that meeting Wentworth Cheswill was chosen to report to the provincial committee at Exeter the proceedings of the meeting and receive their instructions. He was with the men at Saratoga under Col. John Langdon, who marched September 29, 1777.

I have a book from his library on "The Power of Parliaments," printed in London, 1715. It bears the book plate of Edward Mosley and was the gift of Capt. Benjamin Torrey to Wentworth Cheswill. Beneath the

written names of Capt. Benjamin Torrey, Edward Mosley, and Wentworth Cheswill is a line in cypher.

He married Mary Davis of Durham, September 13, 1767. Thirteen children were born to them. They made their first home near Piscassic, now called Moonlight Bridge. This house afterwards became the home of his son Thomas.

He was a prosperous business man. He owned, at the time of his death, all the land bordering on the Wadley's Falls Road, from where now stands the house built by the late Edwin S. Carpenter, west to Moonlight Bridge. The large house still standing on the south side of the road near the bridge was his property and doubtless built by him. He owned a farm in Durham and was at one time joint owner with Benjamin Meade of the Brick House Estate, and property near the town landing. This property extended some ways from the river. Under the brick sidewalk, in front of what is now the Chinese laundry, is a well which was the west boundary mark of the land owned by Wentworth Cheswill and Benjamin Meade.

The house where Arthur Dearborn now lives was his property, and where for many years Martha and Abigail, his two youngest children, lived. From this house a green field stretched away to the house of George Ropelle, now I. T. George's residence, at Exeter Street railroad crossing. Through this field flowed Solon's Brook. There were gravestones in this field when I was a child. Giants were buried here, for we children would find a footstone in line with a headstone twenty feet away and marvel that men ever grew so tall. On the corner opposite the Brick House, or Kittredge Place, a little one-story house was used as a schoolhouse.

Later this was a bake shop, owned by Nathaniel Robinson in the latter years of the war. Below it on Main Street was a two-story house with a front yard, filled with cinnamon rose bushes. Both of these houses came to the heirs of Wentworth Cheswill. They were burned in the big fire.

I wish I could describe as well as I can remember the old-time mansion house of Wentworth Cheswill. In this house I was born and spent my childhood. Every room in its detail of finish and furnishing and the chambers of the ell in their lack of finish is clear in my mind. I will try to describe it as it was in 1864, when it was soon to be sacrificed to the modern ideas in the mind of the owner.

To one who had been familiar with the house in the youth of its existence it would seem to have fallen from its high estate, but the dignity, strength and beauty of colonial architecture was apparent, even when it had withstood the changes of one hundred years. It was beautiful for situation. The stately elm trees in the wide front yard, the shrubbery and old-fashioned garden, and, beyond to the west and north, the farm, one hundred and twenty acres of orchard, corn field, pasture and woodland, to Pigeon's Hill, with its wood road winding through the old growth of pine sloping to the banks of the Piscassic. There flowed the river to the west, through the birches and alders, there the high bush blueberries grew, quite to the abutments of Moonlight Bridge. There were oaks and walnut trees, straight and tall in the rocky pasture, and in the apple orchard the native fruit had a flavor all its own. Beyond, a stone wall, bordered by white bloomed locust trees, enclosed the graves of many Cheswills, marked by slate and marble stones. In the tall grasses, outside the front yard fence, grew ladies' slippers and old maid pinks. There, a little nearer the road side, stood a tall, old balm-of-Gilead tree, from whose branches the medicinal buds fell to the ground and

were carefully gathered for the healing of the neighborhood. There were four big elm trees in the front yard. Stone walls bounded it. Currant bushes grew beside the walls, and the green grass grew all around.

The house faced the south, and it was founded upon a rock. The foundation wall of the east end of the house was part of the ledge. This low-lying ledge extended into the side yard. It was lightly covered with soil in places and chickweed, the children's weather prophet, lived here and held council on hot summer mornings with the weavers of webs upon the grass and told us if the skies would be cloudy or fair. The house looked old but not dejected. Its solid oak timbers had resisted decay, the hand-wrought nails and spikes held beams and boards in their original position, and the great chimney received the flames from the wide fireplaces, with as much safety as when they were built. Time had colored the house uniformly and well.

I have never since seen a house with the same kind of portico. The front door opened upon a flat stone, perhaps two and one half by three yards. Two round wood pillars in each outside corner upheld the roof of the portico, which joined on to the house. From this stone floor five steps of stone led to the front walk and five steps led to flagstone walks which extended from the portico on either side the width of the house. The stone of these steps was cut smooth and shapely. In the angle, formed by the steps on the west, grew phlox, sweet william and marygold but on the east side only striped grass and rosemary would flourish. On either side of the front door, extending the width of the house, was a wall of stone, solidly built from the flagstone walk, up perhaps four feet or higher. This was doubtless the foundation wall. It projected from the house and was topped with a slanting roof not more than two feet wide. This roofed wall seemed a part of the house. A

trick of our childhood was to walk this slanting roof without falling off. Easy enough when we could clutch at the window casings but difficult in the spaces between. The front door was heavy and wide and the latch lifted with a brass handle. There were two windows above and below, on the west side of the front door, and one window in both stories, on the east side. These windows were small-paned and fitted with inside shutters or blinds of panelled wood, in two sections, so half or all the light could be excluded.

The front hall was square, with a high closet built in the wall east of the stairway. Under this closet a table stood, covered with a red woolen tablecloth, the flowered figure of which was in black. The big Bible always had its place here. The wainscoting was after the manner of the times. The stairs were of easy ascent with here and there a broad stair to accomplish the curve. The rooms were lofty, for the time when the house was built. Well finished, huge beams ran horizontally through the ceiling of the rooms and in the outside corners were upright beams, which gave an appearance of solidity and strength, that did not detract from the beauty of the room.

Our parlor was real good. We children felt proud of it. The windows were hung with curtains that rolled up half way and were tied with red cord and tassels. Over these were white muslin curtains, embroidered. The carpet was large figured, red and green. The high-backed sofa and chairs were of black haircloth. A whatnot stood in the corner with a lot of new little things on it and some beautiful shells that our Captain Uncle brought from over-seas. The mahogany framed mirror and the big picture of Shakespeare and his friends hung on the wall. We had oriental pictures. Few people had them anyway. They were something new. We had David's Harp on a blue groundwork, on either side of which

were flowers and yellow glittering steps leading up to the harp. There was a bouquet of roses and a wreath of flowers on white backgrounds. These hung in frames, on either side of David's Harp. All of these pictures were painted with transparent paint, and the crinkled tinsel behind them made them look different from natural. Father made the frames for them, then they were spread over with putty; and peas, beans and corn were laid on them in patterns; and mustard seeds covered the putty in the spaces, and then black varnish made them lovely. Folks used to go a visiting for the afternoon or to spend the day very frequently in those days. So mother used to pull the shutters in the parlor and we wouldn't go in the room unless it was when mother wanted us to be there.

The living room was on the other side of the front entry. In this room there was a bow cupboard built in the east corner. The upper half was oval at the top, and the door had many small panes of glass. Here mother kept all her best china and glass dishes, including the caster with its shining cruets and the spoon holder and its contents. In the lower half of the cupboard the door was panelled. The wide shelves held Britannia ware and on the floor of this cupboard were brown jars, containing company fruit cake and special cookies. In a large frame by the front window hung the picture of a tree, with long roots and branches, and on the branches were names instead of leaves. This picture was the puzzle of my childhood. Then there was the picture of Daniel O'Connor, the Irish patriot, I remember his coat was very short waisted. Over the Green Mountain stove on the mantel shelf were oil and fluid lamps. The wicks in the little upright tubes at the top were covered by day with tiny pewter extinguishers, which hung by small chains from the top of the lamp. Between these lamps stood a mottled brown and white china cow.

a recognition of good behavior we were permitted to raise the lid on the cow's back and fill her with milk which we poured from her mouth when we played party. Her tail was thrown gloriously over her back to form a handle and we had to be very careful not to break her tail or her horns.

A door opened from this room into mother's bedroom, and under the fourposted bed was a trundle bed for the smallest children. Beyond this bedroom and two steps up was the bedroom for the older children.

The winter dairy room opened from the kitchen. There were shelves on one side; two square windows on the other. Here stood the dasher churn and the cheese press.

The kitchen was very large and doors opened from it into the west bedroom, the living-room and parlor and the long ell entry. The fireplace and its belongings occupied all of the south end of the kitchen, except an entrance way to the parlor, on one side of the chimney, and on the other to the living-room. These jogs in the wall were as long as the chimney was deep. The chimney cupboard was in the wall on the parlor side and on the east side of the fireplace was the brick oven. The uneven hearth extended into the room, I should say ten or twelve feet. The stove stood on this hearth and connected with the chimney by a long funnel. We used to play catch and run freely between the stove and the brick oven and in front of the blazing logs without danger. Into the great fireplace a grown man could have walked without stooping, and looking up have seen the stars at mid-day. In cold weather the stove and fireplace doing their level best could not remove the frost from the kitchen windows. The big and little cranes in the chimney did duty on special occasions, but they had retired from active service some years before I was born. The dresser occupied the east side of the kitchen wall with a cupboard built in at either end. There

were three shelves above the wide lowest shelf, and a space below the wide shelf, between the cupboards, was raised a step from the floor. This was a lovely place for a play house, and here we watched with safety the delightful process of washing and sanding the kitchen floor. This floor did not sag but its wide boards were worn uneven by long use and the highbacked wooden rocking chairs managed by the children would make good time in a trip around the room. Three windows flooded the room with sunlight, and, as I write, I see the old room and can hear the echo of "Charming Nellie Gray, they have taken her away," and that other memory of mother's voice, "There's a land of pure delight, where saints immortal dwell."

The kitchen opened into the ell entry. At the east end of the entry was the door to the summer dairy. Stone steps led down to a room whose walls and floor and shelves were stone. In summer the pans of milk stood here, gathering cream for the churning. We children took turns at this, and no cheating. We watched each other well.

We were interested when the tin peddler came around and mother would buy new tin pans with flaring sides for the milk. We would stand around the cart and see all the treasures of the outfit. The brooms that flanked the cart on either side stood straight like heralds and we saw them coming over the bridge and would run with the message, "The tin peddler is a-coming."

On the north side of the ell entry there were three doors. One led to the scullery, an unfinished room, from whose beams in October hung my father's chief agricultural pride. In jackets of canvas, cut in sections like the cover of a baseball, sewed and laced, were squashes, without spot or blemish, and of unusual size; and if father ever boasted about his squashes I know he could deliver the goods. A big dresser and sink fin-

ished the north wall of the scullery. There was a window in this room, and the big back door had long hand-wrought hinges, a latch almost as long as the door, fastened with a bar. It opened on a flat stone, from which three other steps reached the ground. A smooth, flat rock nearby was called the horse block.

Two other rooms opened from the ell entry. The one nearest the end door of the ell was father's work shop. Here was the low shoemaker's bench, with a canvas seat, where our shoes were mended, and here was a high horse, almost a really truly one. We could put the reins around its neck and ride astride or a side saddle, and if we could manage to reach the stirrups we could make the top of his head open and shut. On this the farm harnesses were mended with long thread called "waxed ends."

The other door from the entry led to the wood room. It seemed a far road from the big woodshed in the barn to this place of direct supply. Both of these rooms were finished and the walls were colored a light yellow. Doubtless they were bedrooms for the Cheswills of other days.

Up the back stairs, from the scullery, we could look from the north chamber window over the barn to the woods of Pigeon's Hill. In this unfinished room were spread the walnuts to ripen. Popcorn traces hung from the beams. Here were stored the winter supply of dried apples, rims of dried pumpkin, blackberries, blueberries, and sweet corn. It was a double chamber without the door. In the other room hung bundles of motherwort, thoroughwort, spearmint, catnip, wormwood and mullen, with smaller bundles of gold thread, pennyroyal, sage and bay leaves—a sort of medicine room, as necessary in the household as the pills and pellets of today.

There was one other unfinished room. Here were the white inner husks from the corn, selected with

care for the renewing of the beds. There were bags of feathers for the same purpose, and there were coarser, yellower husks for braiding into mats for the kitchen and back entry doors. Looking up from this room you could see only the great chimney which occupied the center of the dusky attic. Half way up the stairs, like an unset gravestone, stood a church pew door. It was painted white and numbered sixteen. It had been excommunicated and somehow found a place there. The chimney was so wide and the attic so dark that number sixteen seemed like a ghostly sentinel, guarding mysteries beyond, which we children had no desire to probe.

In the front chambers the beams were in the ceiling, overhead, and in the outside corners. In the west room four windows looked to the south and west. The open fireplace was not very large, and nearby a door opened into a dark smoke room, which was a part of the big chimney. Here were cranes for the hanging of the hams. The boards of the floor were wide and smooth and yellow with paint. In the other chamber the walls were papered. Paper curtains were rolled and tied half way up the windows, dividing horizontally a wonderful picture which seemed to be related or connected by incident or location with the big fire board which closed the fireplace. Upon it were castles and bridges and swimming ducks. The mahogany bureau, lightstand and table, the fourposted bed with its spread and valance, the home-made carpet of dark-colored cloth, with bright-colored designs appliqued upon it, are well remembered. In a narrow frame on the walls hung the weeping willow where the weeping lady stood by the grave, the stone of which was marked "In Memoriam." There were companion pictures. The little girl in red dress and pantalets gazing fondly at a lady whose curls were held in place by a high backed comb and underneath it the inscrip-

tion, "This is Mamma." The companion picture, "This is Papa," hung nearby. Napoleon Bonaparte, in characteristic pose, looked from the opposite wall.

The best chamber bedroom was not a bedroom at all. Here were brass-studded hair-covered trunks, chests with tills at each side, hat boxes and bonnet boxes and big round covered baskets. In this room our best clothes were hung in the closets, along with mother's wedding dress of changeable silk, with its high waist well boned, low neck and flowing sleeves all trimmed about with tiny shell trimmings of silk. There was a dark blue velvet cape and lace kerchiefs and collars, and a brown beraige bonnet, wired in rows, with a ribbon bridle in front to pull it over the face, hung on a nail beside a quilted petticoat and a pumpkin hood. Mother said they were old-fashioned. We never saw mother wear them.

I have taken you through all the rooms of the house. I have not told you of the little windowless house, with double doors so wide that a dump cart could be backed into it and conveniently emptied of its load into the cellar; of the barn which stood behind the house and on lower ground so that it was half hidden from the road; of the old willow tree, whose branches near the ground gave us access to limbs higher up, and from this vantage point we could see the tents go up when a circus came to town; of the oak grove beyond the circus ring; the big rocks in the walnut pasture; the rail fences, so easy to climb,

the adventurous land where grew sweet flag, cat-o'-nine tails and tiger lilies; of the beauty of Pigeon's Hill, with its wealth of evergreens, bunch plums, pigeon and checkerberries; of the orchard, with the "best apple tree," the "picked nose" and "striped apple," the tree by the carrot bed, "old sour apple," the tree where the caraway grew, and the watersoaked bitter sweet; the cherry trees behind the barn; the pear trees by the ledges; the sweet briar and cinnamon roses that grew around the square little house with its two small windows and octagonal roof, where inside there was "a little seat for the little wee bear, a middling sized seat for the middling sized bear, and a great big seat for the great big bear." Like the snow that rifted in under its sagging door these landmarks of the Cheswill acres have passed; but memory has treasured the picture of my childhood home, and when I think of the Wentworth Cheswill place, the present day view dissolves, and I see the old house, and my mother's garden with its phlox, sweet william, balsam, and morning glories; the big swing on the elm tree, the barn, with its hiding places in mows and scaffold, and I sit again on the low ledge by the kitchen door, where with frightened eyes we nightly watched the comet, and heard our elders talk of war, of the dreadful crime of slavery, of John Brown and of his body mouldering in the grave; and of the shuddering fear, in the darkness of the night, to know that his soul was marching on.

Newmarket, May, 1916.

EXIT MEPHITIS

By Bela Chapin

Alas! he is gone! his probation is o'er—

How it fares with him now I care not to tell;

But this I will say he will feast no more

On my little white chickens he loved so well.

In the deep frog-pond, where the wild flag grows,
He is taking alone unmolested repose.