

MOSES HARRINGTON JR.

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“The best laid schemes o’ Mice an’ Men” go oft awry.

On the 19th of April, 1775, Moses Harrington Jr. was content. He had been married within the year, after Mary Reed revealed to him that their relationship had produced a child. Moses and Mary were wed by Rev. Clarke in the Meeting-house in April 1774, and Polly was born in July.

He would eventually inherit his father’s farm, rear eight children, and piously occupy a well-placed pew in the Meeting-house. But when Moses’ soul would leave this earth in 1835, this veteran of the Battle of Lexington would leave his home in ruins, his life scattered to the winds.

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Genealogy in the Colonial hamlet of Lexington is complicated by our forebears’ propensity for nomenclative recycling. It got to the point that some contemporaries, sharing a name, would add “East” and “West” as a suffix depending on which part of town he lived in. Others would add “Junior” or “3d,” regardless of whether his father shared his name - he might just be the “third” person of that name to live in Lexington at the time.

Usually, these crossed strings have been already untangled by historians like Charles Hudson and Edwin B. Worthen. For whatever reason, none of them ever got around to Moses Harrington. The 1913 edition of Hudson’s *Genealogies* contains numerous errors in the Harrington section, a result of confusing the vital statistics of three men named Moses. We have finally sorted out the distinctions among the trio, thanks to research of George Quintal and this author.

When one Moses died, the Sr., Jr., and 3d suffixes shifted to serve the living. For the purposes of this biography, we use “Moses Sr.” to refer to the father born in 1710; “Moses Jr.” to refer to the Revolutionary soldier born 1749; and “Moses III” to refer to his son born 1785. Also on the rolls of Capt. Parker’s Company is a “Moses 3d,” not dealt with in this paper, who was a

cousin of Moses Jr., a son of Henry Harrington of East Street, and brother of Jonathan Harrington who was killed in the Battle. The latter Moses 3d probably died during service later in the Revolution.

At the Menotomy Blacksmith's Shop

Moses Harrington Jr.'s grandfather John came to Lexington from Watertown (the part now Waltham) by 1713, around the same time as a cousin, Robert. Robert established his part of the family at Bryant's Corner; John settled east of Granny Hill in the area of Grant and East streets. Together, these two cousins were the progenitors of most of the Lexington Harringtons. Their grandfather had emigrated from England to Watertown by 1642.

Moses Sr. was born on the John Harrington farm in 1710. He married Martha by 1734 in the Lexington church, but she died soon afterward. By 1739, Moses Sr. was living in the "place of swift running water" - Menotomy - where he was chosen precinct tax collector. Also that year, his second wife Sarah Frost was admitted to the precinct church and their first child, Sarah, was born. Moses Sr. operated a smithy just east of the intersection of Mass. Ave. and Broadway, where the Arlington Fire Department headquarters are presently located.

A total eight children were born to Moses and Sarah Frost at Menotomy, including Moses Jr. on Sept. 18, 1749. Five of them died in childhood; Sarah died shortly after giving birth to the eighth, in May 1759.

Moses Sr. remarried to Deborah Winship of Menotomy in 1760 and planned to move his family back to his native town.

At the Scotland Farm

The Munroe clan settled in Cambridge Farms in the 17th century near the Woburn and County roads, and as a result of their Scottish heritage and broguish accents, this crossroads was afterwards called "Scotland" by locals.

Moses Sr. bought a farm at Scotland with dwelling house and barn on April 11, 1762, from Philip Munroe, husbandman, for 190 pounds, 6 shillings, 8 pence. The house lot, 20 acres, was bounded easterly by the County road to Cambridge and northerly by Jedediah and Samuel Munroe. A second 16-acre lot was mostly meadow.

As Moses Sr. prepared to give up his Menotomy smithy and move back to Lexington with his 12-year-old son Moses Jr., he executed the sale with Philip Munroe on "the Eleventh day of

April in the Second Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third of Great Britain King &c.” Their British loyalty was strong and their estates secure in the years before the Townshend Acts. It would not be until March 27, 1775, less than a month before the conflict at Lexington, that Moses would think it prudent to secure his farmstead and register the warranty deed at Cambridge Court.

The province direct tax of 1771 provides a snapshot of this farm at Scotland, where Moses Sr., Moses Jr., and younger brother Caleb lived and worked.

Besides the one dwelling house, they were assessed for 16 acres of pasture where they kept four cows, six acres of tillage capable of producing 70 bushels of grain per year, four acres of English and upland mowing land which produced two tons of hay per year, and 10 acres of fresh meadow producing four tons of fresh meadow hay per year. They pressed nine barrels of cider per year, according to the tax, and kept one horse and two swine.

Moses Sr. was not taxed for a shop building, so he may have given up blacksmithing upon his return to Lexington. The market may have been saturated; two Harrington cousins operated smithys at Bryant’s Corner and Lexington Common.

The family home contained a “number of books” including a Bible, according to Moses Sr.’s probate records. The retired smith also owned a pair of silver buckles, wine glasses, Delftware, pewter teaspoons, a pair of spectacles, a mirror, a suit of armor, and an hourglass.

In the spring of 1774, the Port of Boston was shut and Lexington’s Town Meeting voted to send aid to Boston’s citizens. For whatever reason, Moses Sr. appeared at the meeting to protest the proceedings. We do not know what specifically he protested - perhaps sending resources to another community when people in Lexington were themselves in need.

On April 28, Moses Jr. wed Mary Reed in the Lexington church, and their first child Mary was born July 23.

By that November, under direction of the Provincial Congress, the Lexington Militia began to strengthen its training and take more seriously the “art of military.” They knew they might have to defend themselves against the tyranny of Parliament and the King’s Troops. Membership in the company was voluntary.

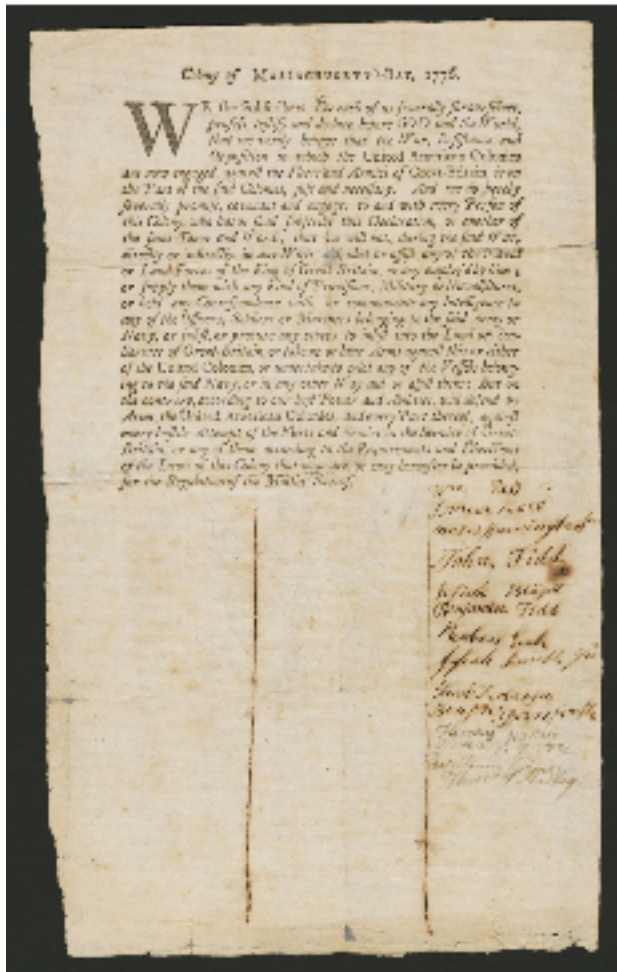
Moses, brother Caleb, and brother-in-law William Reed were among the Lexingtonians who stepped forward.

“Before God and the World”

The town bell tolled on the night of April 18, 1775. A sense of foreboding must have flashed and churned inside all who heard it. Moses and Caleb walked up the Woburn road to learn the news and what would be asked of them as sworn defenders of the town. On their walk, they would have likely joined John and Jedediah Munroe, who lived within shouting distance on the Woburn road, and Philip Russell who lived halfway down the Woburn road toward the Centre.

At dawn that morning, Caleb and two other men were in the Meeting-house fetching gunpowder when the Regulars arrived at the Common. As Caleb bolted from the building with Joseph Comee in the heat of the skirmish, he was shot dead in front of the house of God.

A tobacco box owned by Caleb is today displayed with an array of Revolutionary relics in Buckman Tavern, the building where Caleb and Moses rallied on the night of April 18. Moses Sr.'s probate inventory included a tobacco box, perhaps this one saved as a memento of his brave son.



Moses Jr. picked up and carried on. He served under Capt. Parker for five days at Cambridge, May 6-10, 1775, by order of the Committee of Safety. Just days before the King's Troops evacuated Boston, Moses was with the Lexington Company under Capt. Bridge for five days, March 4-8, 1776, at Roxbury - near Dorchester Heights. By this time Moses had been promoted to sergeant.

If the family had been hesitant about open rebellion, as indicated by Moses Sr.'s protestations at the 1774 town meeting, circumstances had certainly changed. The Regulars had havocked wanton destruction in their town and killed Moses Jr.'s younger brother near the threshold of their Church of Christ. Neighbor Jedediah Munroe had been killed in the afternoon skirmish. This was on Moses Jr.'s mind when, in May 1776, he inscribed his name near the top of an oath declaring “before GOD and the World” that he stood firmly on the side of the “United

American Colonies” and would not in any way aid Great Britain. The text of the oath was provided by the Provincial Congress and signed by the patriots of many towns including Lexington, which needed a second sheet to accommodate overflow signatures. This second sheet, which bears Moses’ name, is now in the collections of the New-York Historical Society.

Moses was commissioned a second lieutenant by 1777, when he served under Capt. Jesse Wyman of Woburn on a campaign to Rhode Island from May 10-July 10. They traveled 54 miles down to Rhode Island over the course of three days. After discharge at Point Judith, it was a five-day trek back to Moses’ Lexington homestead.

Moses and Mary had seven more children between 1776 and 1794. They were admitted to the Lexington church on June 15, 1776, two months before the birth of their second child. On Jan. 11, 1787, Moses’ father died and bequeathed him the entire homestead at Scotland. At his death Moses Sr. was listed as a yeoman, but he still possessed “a number of smith’s tools” from his earlier occupation. His epitaph in Lexington’s Old Burying Ground reads: “To God, I now resign my breath, And safely walk the vale of death; With Christ I’ve lived, in him I die, And pass to Immortality.”



Moses seems to have inherited his father’s piety and attended services at the Meeting-house on the Common. When the new Meeting-house was finished in December 1794, the pews were sold at public auction. Moses was the winning bidder for Pew 21 in the Gallery, for \$18.50. A choice pew on the floor could run \$70-100. In the more affordable balcony, he sat every Sunday next to his cousin Daniel Harrington Jr. (Pew 20), and just down the aisle from John Parker Jr. (Pew 17), whose father commanded Moses on the morning of April 19, 1775.

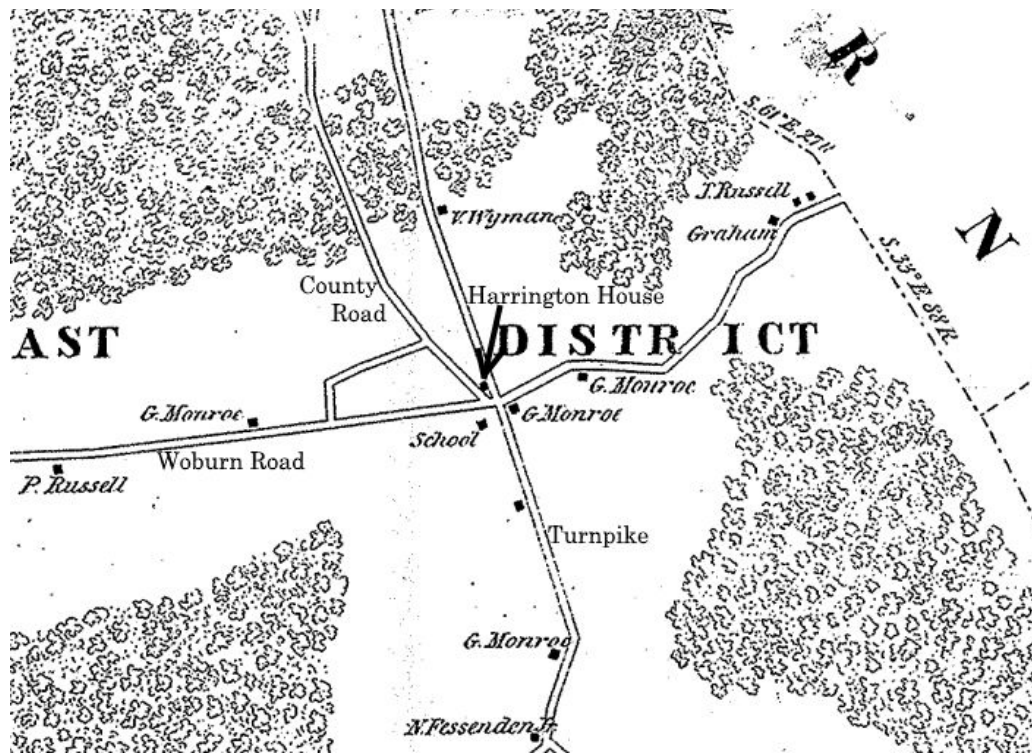
Moses’ son, Moses III, followed his father in military volunteerism. He owned a uniform, sword with belt, pistol, and gun, according to probate records. The formal uniform may indicate he became an officer in the Lexington Artillery Company which was organized after the end of the Revolution, or the Lexington Rifle Rangers which organized in the early 19th century.

“Want and Suffering Circumstances”

The turn of the 19th century brought changes to the Scotland district and to Moses’ station in life.

Town Meeting on Nov. 5, 1804, approved a system of district schools and determined to build a Scotland school “Between Mr. Moses Harringtons & Miss Peirces Oposite to a wild Cherry tree marked, to be 18 by 23.” Some of Moses’ children were still young enough to take advantage of the new neighborhood school, which stood where the Countryside commercial building is today.

Construction started in 1806 on the Middlesex Turnpike. Original plans were re-routed and the new turnpike path was to run directly through Moses’ property. He bought a couple of shares of stock in the turnpike corporation, including one share from Thomas Locke on May 10, 1806. Moses on Nov. 5, 1806, sold a two-acre piece of land parallel to the turnpike, together with rights to a bridle path running through his property, for \$200 to a Nehemiah Randall Curtis of Scituate, probably an investor or agent for the turnpike corporation who was acquiring rights of way.



1854 Map

The turnpike proved a headache for many in Lexington. The corporation had been granted eminent domain power by the state and seized some portions of previously-public road, the old

County road, to incorporate into the new toll road. In 1811, the town protested the toll gate near Reed's Farm, farther down the road toward Arlington, "which place is part of an ancient highway over which they and all the citizens of the Commonwealth have from time immemorial had a right to pass and repass free of toll or any toll whatever. And on which they conceive by law no toll gate can be rightfully erected." Indeed, the old road had been trod by settlers since the mid 17th century as the "path to Capt. Cook's farm," and was formally laid out in 1713 - the year Moses' ancestors moved to Lexington.

Moses borrowed and mortgaged himself through the 1810s and into the 1820s, resulting in a tangled list of promissory notes, real estate transactions, and judgements. What brought on the initial financial stress is not clear.

Between 1812 and 1819, he took 10 separate loans from James Wright of Woburn, evidently a man of means with a 209-acre estate, at around 5 percent interest per annum. Tragedy came for Moses when Wright died around 1819 or 1820. Wright's executor - his brother Aaron, a Boston tailor - called in all outstanding debts.

Moses sold five parcels of land - 43 acres - to Moses III on June 3, 1819, for \$2000. Perhaps he was worried about losing his real estate to creditors and sought to protect the land in his son's name. On Feb. 12, 1820, his son mortgaged the land to Thaddeus Munroe for \$500, and Moses on the same day mortgaged another 30 acres to Munroe for \$500.

In July 1820, Aaron Wright received judgement against Moses at the Boston Court of Common Pleas, in the amount of \$1545.75 in damages and \$70.20 for the cost of the suit. Records of James Wright's estate show he held notes from several other residents of the Scotland district, though none in such a great amount as from Moses. The Middlesex County sheriff was ordered on Aug. 5 by the court: "We command you to take the body of the said Harrington and him commit unto either of our gaol in Cambridge or Concord ... and detain in your custody ... until he pay the full sum above mentioned."

On Aug. 20, Moses mortgaged three parcels including his house lot to Thaddeus Munroe, apparently his new creditor, for \$800. (Discharged 1821.)

Nine days later, two of Lexington's three selectmen, Charles Reed and Nathaniel Cutler, petitioned Middlesex Probate Judge James Prescott to complain about Moses' youngest child, Edmund, age 26: "That in their judgement Edmond Harrington of sd Lexington does by excessive drinking so spend, waste, and lessen Estate as thereby to expose himself to want and suffering circumstances, and does also thereby endanger and expose the sd Town of Lexington to a charge or

expence for his maintenance and support.” The selectmen asked Judge Prescott to appoint a guardian or guardians for Edmund.

On Sept. 2, Moses took a further mortgage on the same parcels, for another \$400 from Thaddeus Munroe. (Discharged 1824.)

Selectmen Reed and Cutler appeared at Concord court on Sept. 5. Edmund failed to appear or answer to the complaint. Sworn witnesses were Benjamin Wyman, Nathan Fessenden, and Edmund’s brother Caleb. Judge Prescott decreed that a suitable guardian be appointed, but no record survives of who was chosen. Charles Hudson’s *History* reports that Edmund left Lexington and never returned.

Moses III faced his own troubles in 1821, seized by the Middlesex sheriff and jailed until his payment of a \$92.07 debt to Ives Hill of Woburn. He paid part of this debt by quitclaiming two acres to Thaddeus Munroe in March.

Moses III died on May 10, with a gross debt of \$1501.50. His executor Josiah Crosby of Billerica was directed to sell his lands. His father Moses was still trying to pay off debts of his own due to the Wright estate, and sold 39 acres to Munroe on May 31.

“We Still Weep for Our Brethren”

Moses’ wife Mary Reed died on Oct. 23, 1822, followed by their unmarried son William on May 14, 1824. With barely any heirs remaining, still hounded by debts, the widower Moses sold three parcels - including buildings - on Oct. 21, 1824 to James Wyman Jr. of Boston for \$1800. This appears to be the last substantial land he owned and probably included his house lot. His next place of residence was the Lexington Alms-house.

“Now thou’s turn’d out, for a’ thy trouble, / But house or hald, / To thole the Winter’s sleety dribble, / An’ cranreuch cauld!”

But a month before this embarrassing move, on Sept. 2, 1824, the Marquis de Lafayette visited Lexington as part of his final American tour to see the ground where the Revolution began. Moses may have been among the 14 survivors of the Battle who greeted Lafayette at the Common, where an arch trimmed in evergreen and flowers bore a hand-lettered banner exclaiming, “Welcome, Friend of America, to the Birthplace of American Liberty!”



Revolutionary Monument and Meeting-house, 1837

According to an account of the visit written by Lafayette's secretary, Auguste Levasseur, two of the survivors "related to us this first scene of the grand revolutionary tragedy, in which they were actors." They "named with tenderness those of their companions and friends who fell by their sides, turning their eyes filled with tears upon the ground ... After some moments of solemn silence, one of the two old men exclaimed, 'we still weep for our brethren, but we do not deplore them, they died for their country and liberty!'"

We cannot be sure that Moses was present for the ceremony, but we can understand that he shared these sentiments. And it is poignant that such a display was made to honor the veterans of 1775 in the very season that Moses turned out of his old farmstead to live a pauper's life.

At the Alms-house

Built at the close of the Revolution in 1784, Lexington's first Poor-house was on Lincoln Street at the site of today's Hayden Recreation Centre. Inmates worked on the adjoining farm and the sale of produce offset the cost of housing and feeding the poor. Some paupers were also expected to pay their way by selling any property they still held.

In the face of his financial troubles, Moses had continued attending church, and even upgraded his seating to a more respectable pew on the main floor. Most of his old gallery pew was owned by Samuel Stone by 1821, and Moses had moved to half of Pew 12 on the ground floor.

In order to pay his way at the Poor-house, Moses sold this half of Pew 12 to Dr. Stillman Spaulding for \$50 on March 14, 1832. Dr. Spaulding paid \$34.34 of his debt to Moses directly to the

Overseers of the Poor during fiscal year 1833 to defray Moses' board. Auditors of the overseers' accounts found that the cost of supporting each pauper in the town's care that year was 66 cents per week, or \$34.32 per annum.

Moses also sold his remaining land in 1832, six acres probably of pasture or meadow, to Reuben Wait of West Cambridge for \$60 on July 12. At this time, his eldest three children were married and living away. His only other surviving child, Oliver, 41, was likewise a charge of the town and lived with Moses at the Poor-house.

“The Last Leaf”

At Town Meeting on April 28, 1834, it was voted “to have the remains of those who fell on the 19th of Apr. 1775 removed to a place near the monument (with the consent of their friends) and inclosed with the monument by an iron fence or railing.”

The committee, which included a few children of Capt. Parker's soldiers, would have approached Moses as the remaining heir or “friend” of Caleb to ask for permission to move the soldier's remains to the Common.

Moses had recently sold his church pew to pay for a year's board. And as a destitute man, despite having offered the first resistance to the King's Troops in 1775, he could not even vote for governor.

Nevertheless, the committee would have humbly and deferentially approached him. Perhaps they found the 85-year-old veteran at home in a chamber of the Poor-house, or working out in the fields to grow produce and pay off his burden to the town.

As preparations continued for the coming 19th of April and excitement built for the grand ceremonies and patriotic displays, Oliver died Oct. 25, 1834 on the Poor Farm, leaving Moses quite alone. Surviving son Caleb had gone to Charlestown years earlier and established a family, and there is no record of involvement in his father's care.

Town laborers burrowed into the back of School-house Hill and dug a tomb behind the Monument to receive the remains of the seven Lexingtonians who died on the morning of April 19, 1775. That same spring, the town sexton would dig a grave for Moses, who did not last long enough to see his brother's reburial.

Moses died in February 1835 - “the last leaf upon the tree” in that spring. The Overseers of the Poor paid for his interment in the Old Burying Ground.

Roof-trees' Ruins

Moses' old house at Woburn Street and Ridge Road descended in Thaddeus Munroe's family as part of their extensive real estate holdings in the Scotland district. They likely used it as a rental property. From Thaddeus, the Harrington homestead fell to his son George, then to George's son Howard, then Howard's sister Elmina by 1950. Her estate conservators sold the property to real estate developers, who disposed the unbuildable house site to the town government in the 1970s.

The house disappeared between 1875 and 1898, leaving a rude cellarhole behind the treeline in what is now Countryside Green, a town-owned park. Historian Edwin B. Worthen, a descendant of Moses, advocated to no avail for a plaque at the old cellarhole. Perhaps someday a marker will be erected to show today's Lexingtonians the site of the roof-trees which once sheltered brave men like Moses and Caleb.

Children of Moses Harrington Jr. and Mary Reed

Married 28 April 1774

Admitted to the Church 15 June 1776

(All born and baptised in Lexington)

- i. Mary, or "Polly," b. 23 July 1774, bp. 21 June 1778
m. 29 Nov. 1792, Joseph White of Lexington
- ii. Sarah, b. 22 Aug. 1776, bp. 25 Aug. 1776
m. 8 June 1798, Thaddeus Hill of Chelmsford (b. 1769 in Billerica)
- iii. Caleb, b. 6 July 1779, bp. 11 July 1779, d. 4 Aug. 1839 in Charlestown
Raised 1806 in Hiram Lodge
m. 17 Dec. 1806, Dorcas Frost of _____
Went to Charlestown, probably the part now Somerville, by 1826
Inaugural member of the Charlestown Fire Department, 1838
- iv. Betsey, b. 16 April 1782, bp. 21 April 1782, d. unm. 13 Jan. 1811 in Lexington
- v. Moses, b. 2 May 1785, bp. 15 May 1785, d. 10 May 1821 in Lexington
Raised 1814 in Hiram Lodge
m. ____ 1817 in Woburn, Esther Gload of ____ (b. 1772 in Chelmsford, d. 1824 in Chelmsford without heirs)
- vi. William, b. 1 Sept. 1789, bp. 7 Sept. 1789, d. unm. 14 May 1824 in Lexington
Raised 1814 in Hiram Lodge
An outbreak of small-pox in Lexington in 1824
- vii. Oliver, b. April 1791, bp. April 1791, d. unm. 25 Oct. 1834 in Lexington
At his death was an inmate of the Poor House with his father
- viii. Edmund, b. 21 Feb. 1794, bp. 1 June 1794
Object of a complaint, 1820, by the Selectmen for posing himself a financial liability
"Left town and never returned," per Hudson's

Moses Sr.'s personal estate, April 12, 1787:

Bible, number of books, armour, cloathing, pair of silver buckles, stone buttons, linning sheet, table cloathes, towels, piller casses, callico covered, woolen covered, small covered, chest of draws with several old chests, pewter brass &c, iron ware, bed in the east room and furniture, trundle bed, bedstead and cord and furniture, bed in the west chamber with some furniture, box iron heaters, iron goose tin lantern, wooden ware, pair of bellows, number baggs, baskot, cheese mill, flax comb, spinning wheels, chest in the east chamber, thirteen chairs, earthen ware, stone ware, stillyard, old knives forks, Delf ware, pewter tea spoons, wine glass, kitchen table, glass bottles, pair candlesticks, pair of _____, wooden ware, pillion and cloath, hour glass, salt, seven yards of cloath, horse chains and fetter, bette and wedges, steel trap, a number of smith's tools, two axes, a number old kain, spectacles, tobacco box, grid iron, looking glass, old cheese press, horse cart and wheels, plow, collar reins (?), back saddle, the hay in the barn one tun of English, meadow's hay, farming tools in the barn, grinstone and krank, iron crow bar, two axes, old boards, chest with old iron, two old bridles, grain seventeen bushel of Indian corn, one bushel and half of beens, _____, purtatoes, turnips, the stock cattles horse and swine &c, orders on the town of Cambridge, notes principal and interest, cash, aboute half barrel of pork, household furniture.

Moses III's real and personal estate, Sept. 6, 1821:

A dwelling house with about three acres of land adjoining the same situated on the Middlesex Turnpike, about 24 acres of land lying on the north side of the Woburn road opposite said house, about two and a half acres on the west side of said turnpike opposite said house, about four acres of peat meadow.

Surtout, coat, uniform, sword and belt, waistcoat, boots, brass kettle, bellows, andirons, looking glass, table, two chests, bed and bedding, iron ware, crockery and earthen ware, churn &c, three pails, cheese press, pistol, saddle, bridle, and martingal, gun, hammer and compasses, clothes horse, trunk, harness, old iron, old casks, box with beans, bread trough and sieve, scythe snath with three old scythes, hand saw, old baskets, steelyards, old cupboard, two shovels, work bench, old hay, half a horse, half two ploughs, muck fork, two yokes and bows,