

Amos Locke

A Brief Biography

By William Poole

Amos Locke was one of four Locke cousins who responded to the alarm of the evening of April 19, 1775. The others were Benjamin, Reuben and Ebenezer. All were first cousins and descendants of William, the first member of the Locke family to immigrate to New England. William was born in Stepney Parish, London, England in 1628 the son of William and Elizabeth. In 1634, at age six, and orphaned, William embarked for the new World on board the ship Planter, Nicholas Trarice, master. He traveled with his Uncle and Aunt Nicholas and Sarah Davies and his cousin, Joseph Davies. Nicholas and the family first settled in Charlestown and then moved to Woburn in 1642 when the town was set off from Charlestown. In 1648 Nicholas sold his house and land in Woburn and moved back to Charlestown. He later removed to York, Main where he died about 1669-70, leaving his nephew William “two silver spoons and five shillings in silver.”¹

William remained in Charlestown and then moved to Woburn where on December 25, 1655 he married Mary Clarke (1640-1715) daughter of William and Mary Clarke of Woburn. Mary was only fifteen when she married, and William 27. Their first child, William, was born December 27, 1657 but lived for only 13 days. A little over a year later, January 18, 1659, Mary gave birth to another boy they also named William. He was the first of eight children who survived to adulthood, William, Jr. (1659-1738), John (1661-1720), Joseph (1664-1754), Mary (1666-1705), Samuel (1669-after 1718), Ebenezer (1674-1723), James (1677-1745), and Elizabeth (1681-1753).²



Present Day View of William Locke Home

William became an extensive land owner in Woburn. He owned house-lots in town, and both he and his descendants would hold a great deal of land in western and northwest Woburn along the current-day Lexington and Lowell Streets. William’s home, much altered, is located at today’s 183 Lexington Street in Woburn. However, much of his land lay in that portion of Cambridge Farms that became Lexington near today’s East and North Streets. Several of his sons lived in this area in close

proximity to one another their lands abutting. When the Town of Burlington, MA was incorporated in 1799, from lands set off from Billerica, Woburn and Lexington, the homestead of William's son, William, Jr., was to be included in the Lexington grant to Burlington. However, Thomas Locke, one of William's grandsons, then living on the estate, petitioned that the homestead remain in Lexington. His petition was accepted resulting in the unusual, triangular-shaped wedge on the northeast corner of Lexington that extends into Burlington.³

William was active in town affairs and was chosen a deacon of the Woburn Church. In 1687 he was one of the slate of Selectman in a controversial election held in contravention of the order of Royal Governor, Sir William Andros forbidding the holding of town elections unless warranted by "certain Justices of the County . . . or by direct authority from the government." When the usual date for holding town elections arrived, February 22d, 1687, the last Tuesday of the month, the voters of Woburn nominated and elected a slate of town officers opposed to the arbitrary rule of Andros. The governor promptly annulled the vote, and the inhabitants were directed to meet March 7th for a new election. They did so, and chose the same men previously elected. The next year the same thing happened. An election was held on February 28th the last Tuesday of the month and the same Board of Selectmen chosen. It was again annulled, but in a subsequent election the Woburnites held firmly to their choices and William was again chosen one of the Selectmen. He also served again in 1696. William died at Woburn June 16, 1720, Mary having predeceased him dying July 18, 1715.⁴

Joseph, the third of William's surviving eight children lived in the part of Cambridge Farms that later became Lexington. His farm was probably located along present day Lowell Street and adjoined his brother William's land. Joseph's first wife Mary (maiden name unknown) died April 17, 1708 having given birth to seven children, a son, Joseph Jr., born March 19, 1699, and six daughters. Joseph, Sr. married twice more and his second wife gave birth to four children.⁵

In 1733, Joseph, Sr. sold his son Joseph, Jr. "15 acres in Lex. bounded S.E. by the town way; S.W. by Dr. Fiske; N.W. by Daniel Tidd; N. by Joshua Simonds and elsewhere by his own land. Joseph, Jr. then purchased from his father 10 more acres abutting his own land; the western half of his father's "mansion house" and barn, and also half of 12 acres in Woburn, "bounded S.W. by Lex. Line, and elsewhere by Samuel Kendall and Samuel Locke. These purchases were obtained for £200 in "bills of credit," "and also partly in consideration of £240 to be accounted towards his portion" [of his inheritance].⁶ Joseph lived in the one-half of his father's homestead and when Joseph, Sr. died in 1754, Joseph, Jr.'s step-brother, Stephen, inherited the other or eastern half. Stephen was the youngest son, and in accordance with the then rules of inheritance he would receive at least a portion of the parental homestead. Ordinarily, the wife would also inherit part of the homestead, but Joseph, Sr.'s third and last wife, Hannah Pierce, predeceased him, dying in 1747.⁷

Joseph, Jr. married Sarah (maiden name unknown) who died May 28, 1777. They had six children.⁸

1. Joseph, born March 28, 1734, married Sarah Baldwin of Billerica May 7, 1761, and died April 27, 1791.
2. Benjamin, born October 10, 1735, died November 13, 1755, age 20.
3. Nathan, born December 2, 1737, died May 19, 1761, age 24.
4. Amos, born December 24, 1742, married Sarah Locke October 19, 1769.
5. Sarah, born August 23, 1746, married Jeremiah Harrington December 21, 1769.
6. Mary, born May 31, 1749, married Isaac Blodgett April 20, 1769.

Charles Hudson in his *History of Lexington* has Joseph, Jr. serving in the French and Indian War in 1754-56. However, in 1754 he would have been fifty-five and by 1756 age fifty-seven. It seems more likely that the Joseph Locke serving in those years was his son, also named Joseph, who was born in 1734 and would have been seventeen and nineteen respectively in 1754 and 1756 and who also served, according to Hudson, as a Sergeant in 1761. Joseph, Jr. died January 13, 1785 age eighty-six, and Sarah had died before him on May 28, 1777.⁹

Amos Locke, the subject of this biography, was the fourth son of Joseph, Jr. and was born December 24, 1742¹⁰. Amos was listed from Woburn when on June 11, 1776, his father, Joseph, sold him “for the nominal sum of £12, his part of the mansion house, and several pieces of land in Lexington and Woburn.”¹¹ Amos on the same day of the previous purchase “gave his father and mother a lease of the premises for and during their natural lives;” and also engaged to provide them ‘with good nursing in their sickness and at all times and under the infirmities of their advanced age, even until their death.’”¹² Prior to this Amos had held no land in his own name and in the 1773 Tax Valuation for Woburn was assessed for no property, since at that time it was all in his father’s possession.¹³

In 1759, during the French and Indian War, Amos enlisted in Captain John Clapham’s Company and was listed again on the Muster Rolls in 1762.¹⁴ On October 19, 1769 Amos, now listed as from Lexington, married Sarah Locke of Woburn.¹⁶ Genealogies of the Locke family state that she “was an orphan whose true name is now lost, who was adopted and brought up by Thomas Locke.”¹⁵ The Thomas Locke who adopted her was born October 22, 1722, son of William and Mary (maiden name unknown). Thomas then married Rebecca Lawrence on June 27, 1751. Interestingly, when Amos’s wife Sarah, died in July, 1835 her age was given as eighty-four which would have meant she was born in 1751, the same year that Thomas had married Rebecca. Amos and Sarah had four children.

1. Benjamin Amos, born December 31, 1769 in Lexington; died October 19, 1829 in Lexington; married 1) in 1808 in Lexington, Betsey Lawrence who died March 16, 1823 in Lexington, 2) June 15, 1823 in Lexington, Sally Marrett, born October 1, 1789 in Lexington, died September 4, 1863 in Lexington.
2. Stephen, born March 23, 1778 in Lexington; died May 10, 1839; married in Lexington or Watertown April 11, 1804, Elizabeth Nichols, born April 11, 1776, died April 12, 1854 in Lexington.
3. James, born December 22, 1784 in Lexington; died January 10, 1848 in Lexington; married February 26, 1811 in Lexington, Lucy Nichols, born May 22, 1788 in Lexington, died October 14, 1867 in Lexington.
4. Amos, born? died July 7, 1841 at Springfield; married March 27, 1805 in Medford Joanna Greenleaf, born March 20, 1780 in Medford, who died August 7, 1841 in Springfield (Hung herself in a fit of mental derangement).¹⁶

Amos farmed and also worked as a tender in a grist mill. The mill was located close to the Middlesex Turnpike, now Lowell Street at Thomas Locke’s Pond (afterward known as Granger’s Pond and today as Butterfield’s Pond). Amos’s farm and homestead were located on present day North Street in Lexington. Following Amos’s death in 1830, his house was taken down. His grandson, William, son of Amos’s son, Stephen, then built the house located at number 79 North Street supposedly where Amos’s house stood. It was known initially as the William Locke house for its builder, but is now referred to as the Amos Locke house. The history of the home is described below.

“This house was built by William Locke (1805-1890), a grandson of Amos Locke (1742-1828), whose house had stood on approximately the same site. Although tradition holds that this was Amos Locke's house, Lexington assessors' records indicate that William Locke, who inherited the Amos Locke property, was assessed more in 1833 for a "new house," strongly suggesting that this house was built the preceding year. This date is confirmed by the fact that "Oct. 20, 1832" is carved on a large supporting beam in the basement of this house and that an 1889 paper by a Locke descendant says that the old Locke house was taken down about 1830 and this one built in its place.”¹⁷

In 1775, then a resident of Woburn, Amos served in the militia of that town as a member of Captain Joshua Walker's Company along with his cousin, Ebenezer.¹⁸ In 1825, fifty years after the engagement on Lexington Common, Amos swore a deposition describing his actions on the morning of April 19, 1775. The deposition in full appears below.

I, Amos Locke, of Lexington, in the county of Middlesex, testify and declare, that, between two and three o'clock on the morning of April the 19th, 1775, I heard the bell ring, which I considered as an alarm, in consequence of a report that, John Hancock and Samuel Adams were at the house of Rev. Jonas Clark, and that it was expected, the British would attempt to take them. Therefore Ebenezer Lock and myself, both being armed, repaired, with all possible speed, to the meeting-house. On our arrival there, we found the militia were collecting; but, shortly after, some person came up the road with a report, that there were not any regulars between Boston and Lexington. Consequently, we concluded to return to our families. We had not proceeded far, before we heard a firing; upon which we immediately returned, coming up towards the easterly side of the common, where, under the cover of a wall, about twenty rods distant from the common, where the British then were, we found Asahel Porter of Woburn, shot through the body; upon which Ebenezer Lock took aim, and discharged his gun at the Britons, who were then but about twenty rods from us. We then fell back a short distance, and the enemy, soon after commenced their march for Concord.

Amos Lock.¹⁹

Further details of how Amos and Ebenezer made their way to the Common were included in some brief remarks delivered by Amos's great grandson, Herbert G. Locke, on December 14, 1887 and later published in the *Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society*. In this account, Ebenezer and Amos hastened toward Lexington Common “coming across lots over the hill by George Wright's house and by Warren Duren's.” The George Wright home is located at 14 East Street. The Warren Duren home, at 56 Hancock Street, is near the intersection of Hancock and Adams Streets. Their route probably took them through fields west of North Street, then over the northern slope of Bucks Hill onto Adams Street and then to Hancock Street and finally down Hancock to the Common.²⁰

Following the engagement of April 19, Amos apparently joined those who pursued the King's troops back toward Boston as he is recorded as having served for four days from April 19th through the 22nd as a member of Captain Joshua Walker's Company of Colonel David Green's Second Middlesex County Regiment, presumably in Cambridge. He is also included in a list dated May 12, 1775 of “training soldiers” belonging to the Third Woburn Company under the command of Captain Timothy Winn.²¹ Charles Hudson has him serving in the “Eighth Campaign, Three Months To the Jerseys (probably 1776), under Captain John Bridges,” but that service is not included in the volumes of *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*.²²

Herbert Locke also related some of the stories concerning Amos in the remarks he had prepared for the Lexington Historical Society as mentioned above. He described Amos as a man who was hard-working and well-liked by his neighbors. He divided his time between his farm and the grist mill where he was employed (he may later have purchased it). Amos had placed a horn at the mill so that those requiring milling could summon him from his farm.²³

According to Herbert, Amos in his old age loved to sit by the fire and tell tales to his grandchildren, one of which described how with a single shot he had killed “just as many pigeons as there are weeks in the year.” [These must have been the so-called “passenger pigeons” that numbered in the many billions when Europeans arrived, flying in flocks that were described as over a mile wide and nearly 300 miles long and taking fourteen hours to pass. The passenger pigeon was hunted to extinction, the last dying in 1914 in the Cincinnati zoo.] Amos related that he used to attach a live pigeon to the well-sweep, and then shake the sweep. The flapping of the wings of the captive bird would attract an approaching flock to fly down to cover the ground and the well-sweep. Thus, he was able to kill the fifty-two he claimed.²⁴ Amos also had his peculiarities. According to what Herbert had been told, Amos always cut his food with a jack-knife and ate from a wooden plate. He also used the shin-bone of a horse to mark one of the boundaries of his land. After a long illness, Amos died on July 27, 1828, age eighty-five.²⁵

NOTE

The Lockes had come to Lexington from what is now Burlington in the 17th Century and by the 19th century owned about 200 acres in vicinity of North, Adams, and Lowell streets. William's



The Old Locke Mill on North Street Lexington, MA

Brother, Nichols, for example, had a farm that included most of the land now Willard's Woods and would soon build the house now at 66 North St. . . . and his brother Stephen would later have a house and farm at what is now 130 Burlington St. (MHC#744). William's father Stephen, who had apparently lived with his parents in the old house on this site, had run what was known as the Locke mill—a planing mill that produced interior moldings—on the site of the house now at 74 North St. After William's death this house was occupied by his unmarried children, Austin William (b. 1852) and Emily (b. 1841). It is said that Emily, a tidy housekeeper, objected to the mess Austin made when taking a bath in the kitchen so Austin created an outdoor bathtub in the brook under the mill. In 1954, after repeated vandalism, the Locke mill was taken down.²⁶

Footnotes

¹John G. Locke, *Book of the Lockes, A Genealogical and Historical record of the Descendants of William Locke, of Woburn. With an Appendix Containing A History of the Lockes in England, also of the Family of John Locke, of Hampton, N.H., and Kindred Families and Individuals*, Boston, James Munroe and Company, MDCCCLIII, pp. 2-15; Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913. Volume II, *Genealogy*, p. 364.

² *Book of the Lockes*, p16; Hudson, p. 364. ³ *Book of the Lockes*, pp. 16-17; Hudson, pp. 366-7.

⁴ *Book of the Lockes*, pp. 16-17; Hudson, 364-5; Samuel Sewall, *The History of Woburn, Middlesex Count, Mass. From the Grant of Its Territory to Charlestown, in 1640, To the Year 1860, By Samuel Sewall of Burlington, Mass., Sometime Pastor of the Church There, With a Memorial Sketch of the Author By Rev. Charles C. Sewall*, Boston, Wiggin and Lunt, Publishers, 1868, pp. 128-30 and 177.

⁵ *Book of the Lockes*, pp. 18-19; Hudson, pp. 365-6. ⁶ *Book of the Lockes*, p. 19

⁷*Ibid.* ⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 27-8; Hudson, p. 368. ⁹Hudson, pp. 368-9; *Book of the Lockes*, pp. 27-8.

¹⁰*Book of the Lockes*, p. 28; Hudson, p. 369. ¹¹*Book of the Lockes*, p. 27. ¹²*Ibid.*

¹³*Massachusetts tax valuation List*

¹⁴ Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts from Its First Settlement to 1868, Revised and Continued to 1912*, Two Volumes, Lexington Historical Society, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston and New York, 1913. Volume I, *History*, pp. 415, 418.

¹⁵*Book of the Lockes*, pp. 38 and 47; Hudson, p. 369. ¹⁶Hudson, p. 369.

¹⁷This information was obtained from the *Lexington Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey* published by the Lexington Historical Commission in 2010 and available on line. The information on Amos's home site is identified as Form B— Building, Form Number 723 and can be found at: SurveyCultural<http://historicsurvey.lexingtonma.gov/property-survey-forms/adams-street-43.pdf>

¹⁸Vincent J.R. Kehoe, compiler, *"We Were There!" April 19, 1775, The American Rebels*, Chelmsford, MA, Self-published, 1973, p. 248.

¹⁹Frank Warren Coburn, compiler, *Muster Rolls of the Participating Companies of American Militia and Minute-Men in The battle of April 19, 1775*, Lexington, MA, Self-published, 1912, pp. 33-4.

²⁰Herbert G. Locke, *Amos Locke*, Proceedings of the Lexington Historical Society and Papers Relating to the History of the Town Read by Some of the Members, Published by the Historical Society, Lexington, MA, Volume I, 1890, pp. 67-72.

²¹ Massachusetts Office of the Secretary of State, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War, A Compilation from the Archives*, Seventeen volumes, Wright and Potter Printing Company, Boston, 1896, vol. IX, p. 895.

²² Hudson, *History*, p. 428. ²³Herbert Locke ²⁴*Ibid.* ²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶ *Lexington Comprehensive Cultural Resources Survey*, cited above.