

Jacob Bacon (1737/8-1776): Wounded at Lexington

The farms owned by the Bacon family were located where the northernmost corner of current day Lexington meets the towns of Bedford and Burlington. Patriarch Nathaniel Bacon Jr and his wife, Abigail (Robinson) ²⁹, lived in Lexington and had four children, Nathaniel III (b1735), Jacob (b1738), Oliver (b1740) and Ruth (b1746). The oldest, Nathaniel III died in 1750 when Jacob was just 12 years old. Oliver Bacon and Ruth Gleason lived near each other in Bedford and Jacob Bacon lived in Woburn Precinct (today's Burlington).^{1,2} He was born at Lexington on March 14, 1737 (1738 if counting by the 'new' calendar of 1752).³ The Bacon family was long established in these towns.⁴

In 1766 Jacob Bacon was a man in the prime of life who had just bought 20 acres of Woburn land from his father.⁵ When the Woburn constable came knocking to perform the ritual "warning out," Jacob likely assured him that he wouldn't be a burden to the town.⁶ From then on, he was on the tax rolls.⁷

In 1768 he married Katherine Davis of Bedford. Daughters Mary (Molly) and Katherine soon followed in 1769. Son Jacob Jr. came along in 1772.⁸ When Jacob's father, Nathaniel died in 1773, Jacob inherited an orchard in Lexington and some woodland in Bedford.⁹ The farm was still rather modest, but lucky him, he was now responsible for paying taxes in three different towns.¹⁰

Where or when Jacob got wind of the April 19 alarm is unknown (perhaps Lexington neighbors alerted him), but he was on Lexington common when the British Redcoats attacked. He owned a musket and sword and may have been armed with both.¹¹ The 'Bloody Butchery' Broadside, published soon afterward, included him among the wounded of Woburn.¹² The Reverend Jonas Clark of Lexington specified that "Jacob Bacon of Woburn" was wounded "in the morning, when hostilities first commenced."¹³ The wound, perhaps severe enough to disable him, prompted Jacob to petition the Massachusetts government "praying consideration and allowances."¹⁴ He was paid "the sum of Seven pounds, nine shillings, in full for his Nursing, Doctering &c."³⁰ Unfortunately the petition itself which may have detailed the extent of Jacob Bacon's wounds on April 19, 1775 could not be found at the Massachusetts archives as many of the early petitions from Lexington and Concord men have been lost.

Further trouble visited the family in the late summer of 1775. The local minister, on returning to his parsonage from a trip to Bedford, "called and prayed with Bacon's family, very sick." Little Jacob, three and one half years old, died nine days later.^{15,16}

In the fall of 1776, Jacob Bacon "was put into Concord Jail, for abusing his wife."¹⁷ The details about the case are not known, for there was no trial for the accused man. On November 7th, 1776, Rev. Marrett, the same minister who prayed with the family the year before, wrote that Jacob Bacon "this day made way with himself."¹⁸ As this was a jail death, there was a coroner's inquest and that jury concluded that Jacob "in a delirium, put an end to his life."¹⁹ The mention of delirium meant that this, in a legal sense, was not a criminal suicide, and thus the family would not be impeded in their inheritance.²⁰ The coldest of comforts.

The family, already suffering, was left to pick up the pieces. Katherine's mother-in-law, Abigail, lived with the family.²¹ Jacob's brother Oliver and brother-in-law Jonas Gleason administered the, thankfully, solvent estate. There were the usual debts to relatives and neighbors to pay off, the usual estate expenses. Nothing extraordinary, except one that must have been a bitter one to pay: £ 1 pound, 5 shillings, and 9 pence to Ephraim Jones. Bitter not because of the man himself, no, but for his profession, the Concord jailor.^{22,23}

Katherine later remarried, Samson Adams of Lexington and in 1784, she gave birth to Zebediah Adams. Samson died the following year.²⁴ In 1790, the first U.S. census shows Katherine Adams and her three children living alone in a Lexington household.²⁵ In 1794, Jacob and Katherine's younger daughter married, started a family and moved away.^{26,27} Jacob's wife, twice a widow, died in Lexington in 1829.²⁸

The various men who one morning stood on Lexington common thereafter led diverse lives. Jacob Bacon's life came to a bad end, the honor he attained on April 19th forgotten amidst his ignominy.

Endnotes

1. Bacon land and probate records describe contiguous and abutting lots spanning the town lines. For example, by 1794, Oliver's house straddled the Lexington–Woburn line and its nearby barn was in Bedford. Middlesex County, MA: Probate File Papers, 1648-1871, online database. AmericanAncestors.org. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014, from records supplied by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives. Digitized images provided by FamilySearch.org, <https://www.americanancestors.org/DB536/i/14459/678-co5/38161006>. Nathaniel & Abigail's daughter Abigail Winship lived in Lexington, but perhaps in a different part of town.
2. Nathaniel Bacon's 1773 division of estate gives the residences of family members. Middlesex Co. deeds Vol. 78, p. 166, "Massachusetts Land Records, 1620-1986," image 161 of 569, FamilySearch <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89Z7-LWD3?cc=2106411&wc=MC1M-5WL%3A361613501%2C361802901> : 22 May 2014.
3. Charles Hudson and the Lexington Historical Society, *History of the town of Lexington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts; from its first settlement to 1868, Revised and continued to 1912*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1913), 18.
4. Vital Records for Lexington, Woburn, Bedford, The Massachusetts Vital Records Project, <http://ma-vitalrecords.org/Towns.shtml>.
5. Middlesex Co. deeds Vol. 75, p. 119, image 525 of 746, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3QS7-89Z7-F2QP?cc=2106411&wc=MC1M-R38%3A361613501%2C364563201> : 22 May 2014.
6. Woburn Town Records for the year 1766. Microfilm at Woburn Public Library. Towns felt responsible for their poor, but not the poor of other towns. 'Warning out' new arrivals started a legal paper trail that could be used, if needed, to return people to their previous town.
7. Woburn records for the year 1767, 'Precinct' tax assessment list, microfilm at Woburn Public Library.
8. Lexington Vital Records, Marriages: Jacob Bacon & Katherine Davis of Bedford, 1768 Feb. 13; Burlington Births: Katherine and Mary Bacon baptized 1771 June 30; Woburn Births: Jacob 1772 Jan. 01, The Massachusetts Vital Records Project.
9. Nathaniel Bacon's 1773 division of estate.
10. Jacob's presence on the Lexington and Bedford tax records, yet to be verified, is a near certainty.
11. Jacob Bacon's 1776 Probate, Middlesex County, MA: case 651, p. 5, <https://www.americanancestors.org/DB536/i/14459/651-co5/0>.
12. "Bloody Butchery, by the British Troops: or, The Runaway Fight of the Regulars," *The News Media and the Making of America, 1730-1865*, accessed March 21, 2019, <http://americanantiquarian.org/earlyamericannewsmedia/items/show/21>.
13. Clark, Jonas, *Mr. Clark's Sermon*. Delivered April nineteenth, M,DCC,LXXVI, (Boston, MA: Powars & Willis, 1776), 28, <https://archive.org/details/fateofbloodthirs00clar/page/n31>.
14. Massachusetts House of Representatives, 1776 Jan. 29, *American archives. Fourth series : containing a documentary history of the English colonies in North America, from the King's message to parliament of March 7, 1774, to the Declaration of Independence by the United States, Vol. 4 in 4th series*, 1425, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=umn.31951002076387b;view=1up;seq=781>.
15. Rev. John Marret, his interleaved diary, 1775 August 11, excerpts contained in Hurd, D. Hamilton, *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*, (Philadelphia, PA.: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1890), 676, <https://archive.org/stream/historyofmiddles01hurd#page/676/mode/2up>.
16. Vital Records of Woburn, Jacob s. of Jacob, 1775 Aug. 20, The Massachusetts Vital Records Project.
17. Rev. Marrett's diary, 1776 Nov. 07.
18. Loc. cit.
19. "Concord MA Records, 1774-1797," miscellaneous folder held by American Antiquarian Society.
20. In English common law, the property of a prisoner committing suicide was technically subject to forfeiture to the state. Sheila Moore "The Décriminalisation of Suicide," Ph D. Thesis: Department of Law London School of Economics and Political Science January 2000, 29, <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/1573/1/U136493.pdf>.
21. Woburn Town Records, 1776 Dec., warning out of a family at Abigail Bacon's domicile.
- 22.. Jacob Bacon's 1776 Probate.
23. Jones as Concord jail keeper, Samuel Adams Drake, *Historic Fields and Mansions of Middlesex* (Boston, MA: J.R. Osgood and Company, 1874), 381, <https://archive.org/details/historicfieldsm00drak/page/380>. The Concord jail was located adjacent to the South burial ground.
24. Vital Records of Lexington, marriage: 1779 Nov. 11; baptism of Zebediah: 1784 Oct. 03; death of Samson: 1785 Aug. 26, The Massachusetts Vital Records Project.
25. "United States Census, 1790," database with images, FamilySearch, Massachusetts > Middlesex > Lexington > image 1 of 2; citing NARA microfilm publication M637, Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, <https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:33SQ-GYYG-99JM?cc=1803959&wc=3XTM-1PL%3A1584070703%2C1584070702%2C1584072033> : 14 May 2015.

26. Vital Records of Lexington, marriages: 1794 April 24, Samson Adams & Katherine Bacon, The Massachusetts Vital Records Project. A "Polly" who married in 1811 may have been her sister or cousin.
27. Joel Whittemore, *Genealogical Record of Many Fitzwilliam Families*, in Rev. John F. Norton, *The History of Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, from 1752-1887*, (New York: Burr, 1888), 715, <https://archive.org/details/historyoffitzwil00nort/page/714>.
28. Vital Records of Lexington, 1829 Apr. 25, The Massachusetts Vital Records Project.
29. Vital Records, Massachusetts Marriages, 1633-1850.
30. Provence Laws (Resolves, etc) 1775-76 [Chapter 915] Page 356.