

**MAJOR JOHN LANE
Of Billerica
1661-1714/15**

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MAJOR JOHN LANE OF BILLERICA 1661-1714/5

Among the nine children born to Job and Sarah Lane, or to Job and his second wife, Hannah (Reyner) Lane, between about 1650 and 1669, there was only one son. The infant boy had older sisters, and he was to have younger ones. He was Hannah's first child. The baby was born in Malden, Massachusetts, in October 1661. He was named John Lane. His parents carried him to Dorchester for baptism. The journey was not undertaken immediately, and John was about three months old, rather than the customary one week, when he received the ordinance. The minister, Richard Mather, wrote that the child's advanced age was "by reason of their living so remote"¹.

The trip to Dorchester was the personal desire of Job and Hannah because Malden's church had been gathered twelve years previously; its minister was Michael Wigglesworth²; and Job had built its first meetinghouse three years before John's birth³. However, Job and his first wife, Sarah, probably had lived in Dorchester for a short time before they had settled in Malden⁴. Job may have been assuring his earlier minister of the well-being of his family after his sorrow at Sarah's death.

John's babyhood slipped by in Malden. He remembered almost none of it because when he was four or five years old, his family moved to the southern part of Billerica where his father had acquired a large farm and had built a house⁵. It had been Governor John Winthrop's farm of 1,500 acres. It lay in what today is northwest Bedford and it occupied about a quarter of the present town. Job had negotiated for it with the Governor's grandson, Fitz-John Winthrop. It was uninhabited and unused. John watched his father construct the out-buildings, lay out the orchard, select the areas to be used as tillage, mowing, pasture, woodland, meadow, and swamp. A self-sustaining farm was being created under the eyes of the lad. John was to inherit one half' of this land, or 750 acres. He was to share, under the terms of his father's will⁶, the total acreage with two of John's nephews, Samuel Fitch and Matthew Whipple.

The boy was a member of a family business. His interests were those of his parents. When Job moved to South Billerica, he did not sell his property in Malden, where he owned two houses and a sawmill, along with the land⁷. He leased the sawmill with one house and probably rented the other house while he was living in Billerica⁸. John watched his father as he supervised the Malden estate and as he trained apprentices in his own trade, that of housewright⁹.

Moreover, Job owned 24 acres of farming land in England which he directed through correspondence. His overseers were relatives or personal acquaintances who kept the property rented, paid the taxes, and collected the rents¹⁰. John learned how his father did this, and later he carried on its administration after his father's death¹¹.

John's sisters were his playmates because there were no neighbors¹². The land in South Billerica outside of his father's farm had been granted in lots of many acres to several men, Gookin, Oakes, Mitchell, and so on. The lots were unoccupied and idle. The grantees were holding them as investments and selling them for cash when the opportunity occurred. It was the second or third group of owners who settled on the land to develop it. John was about 15 before inhabitants with families became his neighbors. The boy met young people from other sections of Billerica when he entered the seasonal school and when he attended public worship services with his parents. He depended upon his family for his day-to-day relationships and for his understanding of the rhythms and problems of pioneer farming.

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In 1675 groups of Indian warriors, under the instigation of King Philip, made skirmishes and sorties into the towns north and west of Billerica¹³. In preparation for Billerica's defense, the town named eleven private homes to be used as garrisons and allowed John's outlying home to be supplied as the twelfth. The selectmen assigned two soldiers as guards for it and impressed his father for active duty¹⁴. Job was so disturbed by the trouble and peril that he wrote about it to his caretaker in England¹⁵.

John was fourteen. He was caught up in military activity. Probably he joined the militia as soon as he could (at 16). He was to be on call for active duty for more than 13 years¹⁶.

Job's custom of keeping in touch with his relatives, both here and in England, helped John find a wife. He selected his second cousin, Susanna Whipple, daughter of John of Ipswich, for his bride¹⁷. Susanna's mother, Martha Reyner, and John's mother, Hannah Reyner, were cousins¹⁸. John was about 21 when he married; Susanna was 19. (1681/2).

After the wedding, Job and Hannah moved back to Malden. John and Susanna lived in South Billerica on Job's farm which John would inherit. It was equipped and stocked. John oversaw its management effectively. After he had been in charge for seven years, he was paying one of the largest tax bills among 73 heads of families in Billerica¹⁹.

Their house was the one Job had built in 1664/5. Probably it stood on the only road through that part of town, the road from Billerica meetinghouse to Concord meetinghouse which had been marked out in 1660²⁰. (Map #1) The southern end of the road was through marsh land and swamps while the northern part lay over upland, or high, dry ground²¹. It is probable that the house had been built on the north part perhaps on the present North Road somewhere between Wildwood Drive and Appletree Lane. (*Ed. Note: Recent research shows us this is incorrect, as the original house may have been what is now next to Carter Way, across the street the David Lane House on North Road.*) The historians, Henry A. Hazen and Abram English Brown²², believed the present Job Lane House at 295 North Road may have been the original structure²³. However, architectural historians have dated this house at about 1720 or a little later, or more than 50 years after the first Lane farmhouse had been erected.

Ed. Note: Research tells from research by Orville Carroll, that it was built in 1713 when Job married Martha.

When the existing Job Lane house was constructed, it contained a hall with a room beyond it under the sloping roof, a room which may have been used as a kitchen. Upstairs there was one chamber over the hall and an unfinished storage area or attic over the kitchen. The main doorway and the chimney were on the west end of the rooms. The house was one room long and two rooms deep; today such a structure often is called half-a-house. The parlor and the west chamber were added 100 years after the half-house had been built²⁴.

The house of 1664/5, where first Job and Hannah, then John and Susanna had lived, was a four-room building²⁵. Downstairs there were the hall and the parlor. The hall was the family room where all indoor activity took place. It may also have been the kitchen. The parlor was furnished with beds and their covers. It was the master bedroom. Upstairs were two chambers, one being sparsely furnished and perhaps used as storage part of the time. Across the back ran a lean-to with another attached to the east end of the house. The configuration of rooms suggests that there was a central, south door and entrance space separating the hall from the parlor. The cellar contained casks which may have been used to store preserved meats. The furnishings in the house were worth £144.

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John and Susanna had nine children. Three died in infancy; three were boys and three were girls²⁶. Before the two youngest were born, Billerica had a new meetinghouse. John began to take an active part in the affairs of the church. He served on a committee to seat the new meetinghouse²⁷, a position both delicate and tense. Everyone was to be contented and satisfied with his seat in the room; if necessary, some must be moved and appeased until all were happy.

In August 1692, Indians raided North Billerica, killing all the members of two families who lived in that area²⁸. The town renewed its vigilance in watching and guarding. Lieutenant John Lane was in charge of the mounted militia. He was ordered, in line of duty, to impress four of his troopers for scout duty and to send four others to serve with his commanding major²⁹.

Three years later in a section east of Concord River and north of Billerica center, Indians attacked the inhabitants in the middle of the day³⁰. Fifteen were killed or taken prisoner. Some were injured, yet survived, while others escaped. The Indians were pursued but were not discovered. It was reported that they had tied together the jaws of their dogs so that there could be no barking to give hints to their trail³¹.

It was during this period that John Lane became a leading militia man in Billerica³². Quickly he rose from lieutenant to captain, and then to colonel. In 1696/7, in preparation for more guard duty, he was ordered to inspect his troops, making sure each man had a carbine and a pistol, and that the troop was prepared for active duty³³. However, that year the trouble was in Dunstable, Haverhill, and Lancaster.

John's children were aware of possible Indian infiltration. More than 100 years after the event, one descendant told the story of John's daughter, Mary Lane, who had been born in 1686³⁴. During an alert when she was 18, Mary was placed in a garrison where there was a guard. Looking out of a window in the roof of the building, Mary saw a stump which made her suspicious. She asked the guard to fire at it and when he refused, she took up a gun, aimed at the stump, fired, and killed one Indian.

John took part in town affairs when his military duty lapsed into quietude. He began to work as a selectman for Billerica, a post he held for about 11 years³⁵. Sometimes he exchanged it for the assessor's position, and sometimes he combined the two. He held assessors' meetings in his home. He was paid for the refreshments Susanna brought into the hall for the participants, and for the hours he spent making out tax lists.

John was 37 and a town officer in Billerica when his father died. Carefully Job had remembered each of his immediate descendants³⁶. Two of his daughters, John's sisters, had died before Job wrote his will. Each left one son to whom Job gave part of his farm in Billerica.

Samuel Fitch, son of Sarah (Lane) Fitch, had built a house on Job's farm. It stood near the present Appletree Lane in northwest Bedford. It was used for about 125 years before it was taken down³⁷. Job gave Samuel a quarter of the Lane farm (375 acres) in two pieces. One part (96 acres) was to be around Samuel's house, his fenced field, his orchard, and his crooked meadow. The remainder was to be elsewhere. By agreement the heirs measured it to lay along the southern boundary of the Lane farm, a long, thin strip of woodland and swamp containing 179 acres³⁸.

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Matthew Whipple, son of Jemima (Lane) Whipple, was the other grandson to whom Job gave part of his farm in Billerica. It too was to contain 375 acres and was to be laid out at the Brothers Rocks on Concord River. It was to include flag's meadow, the north end of crooked meadow, and the meadow at the Brothers. Matthew never developed his share of the farm; it was an investment and later was sold, probably in small lots over several years.

John inherited one half of the land (750 acres) in the central part of the Lane farm. Samuel's house was north of John's share and Samuel's strip was south of it. Matthew's land was west and north of John's part. (See Map #2) John had the house where he lived, the out housing, the orchard, the upland he had improved, and land to the west reaching the river.

Samuel Danforth of Billerica surveyed the Lane farm and made the three divisions, this was the first of many divisions of the 1500 acres which were to occur between that time and now. Danforth signed his plan in 1706. Today it is in a private library and is reproduced here with permission of the owner. (Map #2)

During the year of Job's death, a flood carried away the bridge over Concord River which he had built for the town in 1667³⁹. John was a committeeman in 1698 to deal with representatives of Chelmsford and Dunstable to build a new bridge⁴⁰. Later he was empowered to act for Billerica in building the bridge, that is, to sign the agreement with the workmen and to oversee the construction⁴⁰.

During Queen Anne's War (1703-1713) John was a scout carrying orders from Governor Joseph Dudley to officers in Groton and Lancaster⁴¹. A list of 29 men who served under him at Dunstable has been preserved⁴².

As selectman John appealed to the court for advice on care of a widow, perhaps an indigent, lonely person. The reply was that the selectmen should appoint someone to care for her. John gave a bushel of Indian corn for her support⁴³.

At town meetings John reported on the course of new roads. One, called Pine Hill Road today, increased the access to John's neighbors. It opened in 1694, leading from the Lane farm to Wilson's and Bacon's mills, to other husbandmen, and to the weaver, Jack Lemon⁴⁴. John's daughter Susanna would marry Nathaniel Page, son of a farmer living to the east on the new road⁴⁵.

John often ran the town's line with Concord and with his own farm⁴⁶. Missing markers were renewed, and old ones verified. He settled boundary disputes among abutters and supervised the division of Billerica's common land west of Concord River. Allotments of that land were given to heads of families depending on how much each had received of the original town grants. The Lane farm had been purchased from Fitz-John Winthrop. Billerica had not given the Lanes any land. So, John Lane would have had no right in the grants west of the river. However, he was given 127 acres in consideration of the large tax he paid the town.

After several years of service as committeeman, selectman, and assessor, John was sent to the Great and General Court in Boston as the deputy from Billerica⁴⁷.

John's work in behalf of the church and his influence in his own home resulted in pious lives for his three sons. John oversaw the building of pews in the meetinghouse, and the purchase of a bell. He held conferences with a prospective candidate for the pulpit, establishing a contract between new minister and the town⁴⁸.

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John carried on the administration of the English estate he had inherited from his father much as his father had done. There was an overseer, usually a relative, to whom he gave instructions. He took at least part of its income in goods. Once he ordered 20 ells of Alamode (a black silk), 4 Kentish pieces, 6 Ells of Holland (linen), 5 pieces of new fashioned material, two of which were to be a solid color for clothing for his wife and his mother, 6 yards of broadcloth, 3 pieces of Kersey from Devonshire (homespun woolen fabric), and a large bible with course print⁴⁹.

The last three years of John's life were quiet. He neither rode with the militia nor sat with committees or boards. Susanna died August 4, 1713, when she was about 51⁵⁰. John lived a year and a half longer. He was ill part of this time and under the care of doctors and nurses. His relatives and neighbors helped during this difficult time⁵¹. He died January 17, 1714/5 at 54.

John left no will. His children spent three or four years dividing his estate among themselves to the agreement of all. The record of the division of his property has been preserved. It includes an inventory and a detailed description of the five allotments of land among the five children who were living in South Billerica⁵².

His property was worth £1363. He had 828 acres of land, his favorite mare, his buildings, and a saw mill. His personal property included his arms, books, rings, silver tankard and spoons, pewter and other things kept in the hall, and 26 yards of cloth. There were farm animals and farm tools. His three sons were keeping some of his animals. The livestock was worth £120.

Five of the six children were married⁵³. Two sons-in-law were living in South Billerica and they received a share of the land in the estate. One son-in-law was living in Concord and he received a sum of money in place of land. The formula for dividing the land among five heirs is unknown. The sons, from the oldest to the youngest, had 286, 175, and 218 acres each. The sons-in-law had 44 and 151 acres each. The total acreage was 874. The disposition of the buildings and the saw mill was not described.

John Lane's farm lay in the present northwest of Bedford. Five of his six children became important inhabitants of Bedford when it was created in 1729. John had learned from his father how to be a director, a supervisor, and a leader of men. He has been remembered by the historians of Billerica and Bedford for his prowess as an Indian fighter and Colonel ⁵⁴ of militia troopers, a talent he developed in response to the era in which he lived.

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John's children:

Susanna born Jan. 24, 1682/3; married Nathaniel Page Nov. 6, 1701; died Sept. 2, 1746;
Nathaniel was an heir.

Job born Nov. 19, 1684, died Jan. 7, 1684/5.

Mary born May 15, 1686 married John Whitmore; died Mar. 27, 1783; John was an heir

Jemima born June 27, 1688, died July 10, 1688.

Job born June 22, 1689; married 1st Martha Ruggles Dec. 1713; she died Sept. 14, 1740;
married 2nd Mary Fassett, died Aug. 9, 1762

John born Oct. 20, 1691; married 1st Catherine Whiting Dec. 31, 1714; she died Apr. 1,
1731; married 2nd Hannah Abbott Mar. 16, 1732; died Sept. 23, 1763.

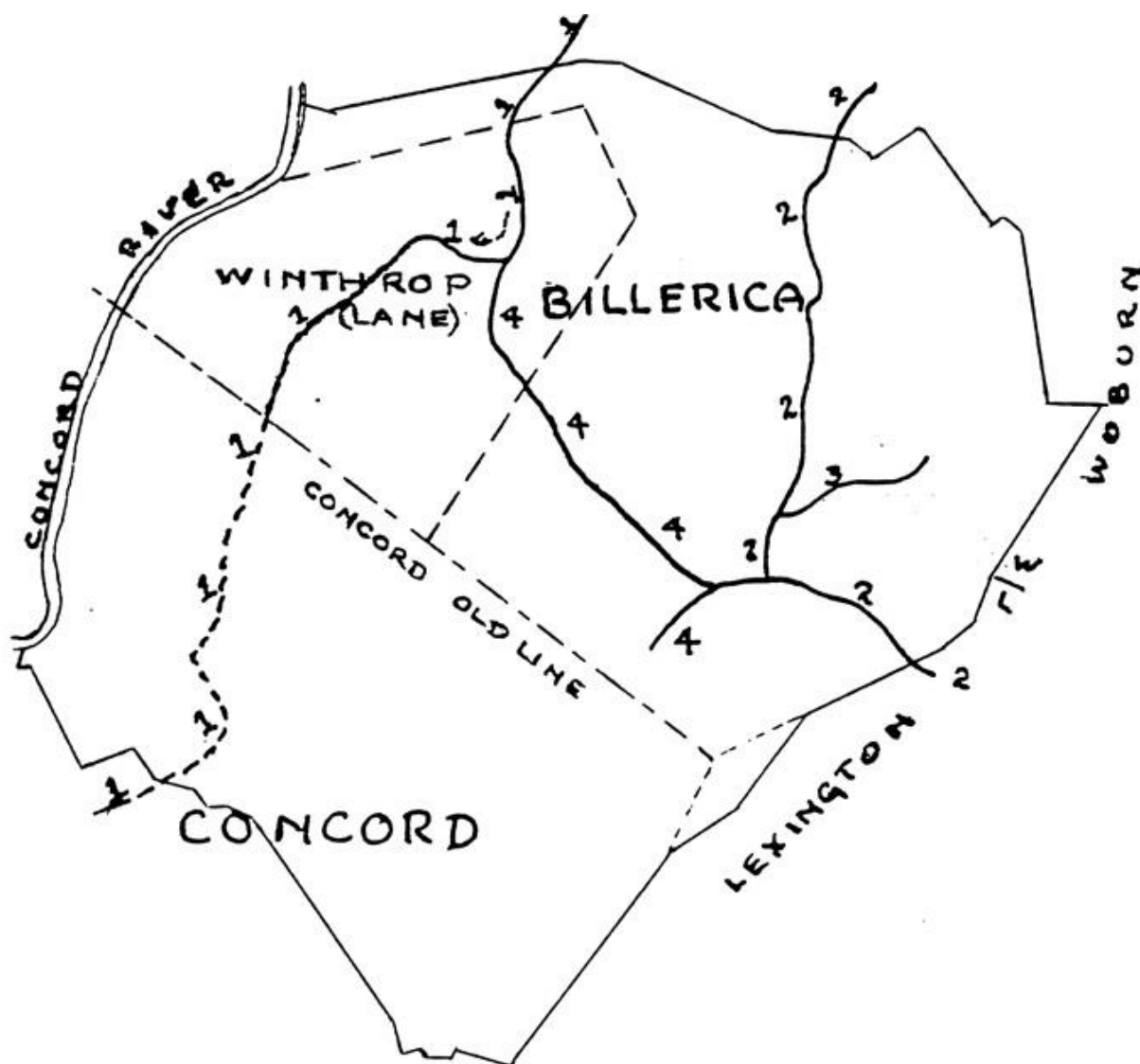
Martha born Oct. 1, 1694; married James Minot Nov. 14, 1716; died Jan. 18, 1735; James
was an heir.

James born Aug. 12, 1696; married 1st Martha Minot Apr. 30, 1719; she died July 3, 1762;
married 2nd Cherry Wellington Aug. 9, 1764 she died Dec. 17, 1764; married 3rd
Mrs. Abigail Fanner May 22, 1766 she died Feb. 25, 1773; married 4th Mrs.
Abigail (Howard) Merriam Jan. 20, 1774; he died Apr. 11, 1783.

Joseph born Jan. 18, 1698/9; died before his father in Jan. 1714/5.

Plan of South Billerica and Concord East Part about 1700, showing Winthrop (Lane) Grant and early roads

- 1) c1660 Road, Billerica to Concord the dotted line indicates uncertainty of location through swamp in Concord East Part.
- 2) c1663 Billerica to Lexington, now Old Billerica Road and east end of Page Road
- 3) 1683 to Wilson's mills
- 4) 1694 Pine Hill Road, west end of Page Road, and Brooksbie Road



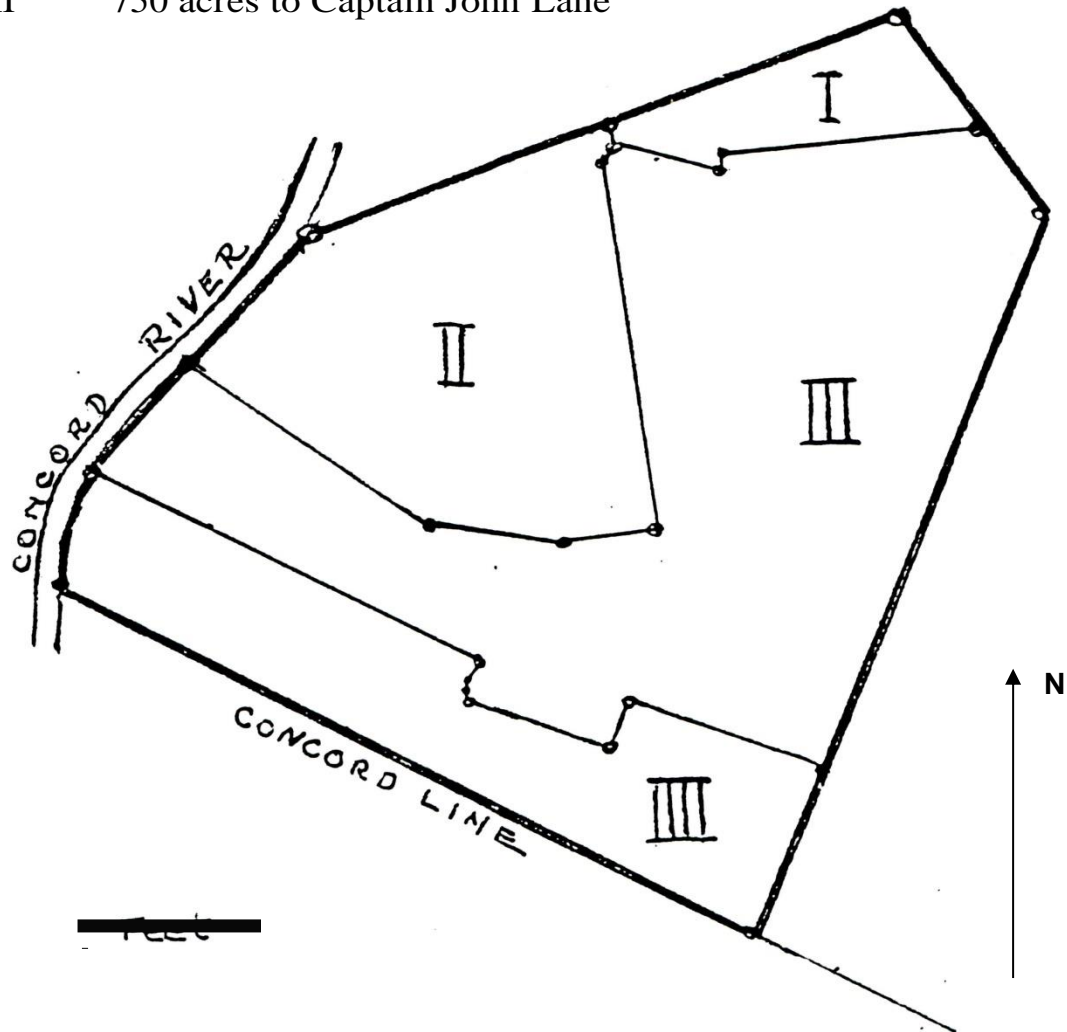
MAP #1

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DIVISION OF JOB LANE'S LAND

From survey by Samuel Danforth in 1706

- I and III 375 acres in all to Samuel Fitch
- II 375 acres to Matthew Whipple
- III 750 acres to Captain John Lane



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MAP #2

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Sources and References

1. Brown, Abram English, History of Bedford, Bedford, 1891, genealogical section, page 20, column 1; hereafter called AEB; Hazen, Henry A., History of Billerica, Boston, 1883, genealogical section, pages 88-9; hereafter called HAH
2. Weis, Frederick Lewis, The Colonial Clergy and the Colonial Churches of New England, Lancaster, 1936, alphabetically arranged
3. Corey, Deloraine Pendre, History of Malden, Malden, 1899, pages 204-5
4. Dorchester Church Records
5. AEB., illustration between pages 8 and 9, HAH., page 881 docket # 13571
6. docket # 13571
7. Corey, page 70; docket # 13571
8. N. E. Historic and Genealogical Register, vol. 11, page 233
9. *ibid.*, page 108, vol. 13, page 204
10. *ibid.*, vol. 11, p. 102-113; 231-241; vol. 17, p. 266, 331-3
11. *ibid.* vol. 17, p. 331
12. HAH., map inside the hard cover; he gives 5 neighbors: Bacon who came about 1680, Brooks who came about 1670, Fassett who came about 1679, Grimes who came about 1677, and Wilson who came about 1682
13. HAH., p. 110-1
14. *ibid.*, p. 117
15. N. E. H. & G. Reg., vol. 11, p. 231
16. HAH., p. 129, 138; records show from 1693 to 1706
17. HAH., gen. sec. p. 89
18. N. E. H. & G. Reg., vol. 11, p. 360
19. HAH., P. 194
20. HAH., p. 89

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Sources and references

21. AEB., p. 34-5
22. History of Billerica and as in reference 1.
23. HAH., gen. sec. p. 88 and #22 on map, AEB., p. 102, col. 1, "Winthrop Farm"
24. Report of the Preservation Partnership, Oct. 1977, to the Bedford Historical Commission
25. Docket # 13577; inventory lists the names of rooms and their use.
26. HAH., gen. sec. p. 89
27. Billerica town records
28. HAH., p. 127-8
29. *ibid.*, p. 129
30. *ibid.*, p. 129-30
31. *ibid.*, p. 130
32. HAH., p. 135
33. *ibid.*
34. HAH., p. 138
35. Billerica town records
36. docket # 13571
37. AEB., p. 102, col. 1, "Brookside"
38. Registry of Deeds, book 20, page 470

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Sources and references

39. HAH., p. 99; AEB., gen. sec. p. 20, col. 1
40. Billerica town records
41. HAH., p. 136
42. *ibid.*, p. 139
43. Billerica town records
44. AEB., p. 31, col. 1; HAH., gen. sec. p. 115 "2. Israel"
45. AEB., gen. sec. p. 20, col. 2; p. 26, col. 1 map in front, # 16
46. Billerica town records
47. *ibid.*
48. *ibid.*
49. N.E.H. & G. Reg., vol. 17, p. 332-3
50. HAH., gen. sec. p. 89
51. docket #13577
52. *ibid.*
53. HAH., gen. sec. p. 89 & p. 102 "Nathaniel Page"
54. He was called colonel by both Hazen and Brown, but his sons called him Major John Lane;
Registry of Deeds, book 20, col. 1