

ANNALS OF CHICOPEE STREET

1675-1875

THE first settlers in Chicopee were Japhet and Henry Chapin, and their brother-in-law, Rowland Thomas. Japhet and Henry were sons of Dea. Samuel Chapin, one of the early settlers of Springfield. Rowland Thomas had married his daughter, Sarah. Dea. Samuel was an intelligent, energetic Christian man, and we soon find him influential and prominent in the affairs of the town and the Province, as well as in the church. His social position is shown by the edifying record, that in the Meeting House,—

“Goodwife Chapin is to sit in the seate along with Mrs. Glover, and Mrs. Hollyocke.”

There is one tradition that Dea. Chapin was of Welsh origin, and another that he was of Huguenot family. Some color is given to the latter tradition by the name of his wife, Cicely, a name found in early French families.

An old writer has said, “God sifted three kingdoms, that He might plant the finest of the wheat in New England.” From whatever clime or province these sturdy ancestors of ours came, their history shows that they were in truth of “the finest of the wheat.”

As the early records are imperfect, it is difficult to determine the exact date of the first settlement in Chicopee; but a host of well-preserved family traditions bear witness to the evidence of grants and deeds, that by 1675 Japhet and Henry were living in homes of their own. Japhet's house was on the bank of the Connecticut River, in Chicopee Street, on land now (1898) owned by Mr. Charles E. Baker, and northwest of his house. The cellar hole of Japhet's house and the old road leading to it remained until within a few years. Henry's house was near the west end of what is now Exchange Street in Chicopee Center. Rowland Thomas lived near Henry.

The first grant of land in Chicopee was in 1659:—

"One farme Given to Mr. John Pyncheon, Lying over Chickuppy river, with the Islands of s^d River, below the plaice called the wading plaice with the Medow on the South side, also a Swamp betwixt the Medow and the River; this farme is by us bounded viz., to run up the Grate River, Northward to the Brook called Willomansett, so up the brook to a foot parth y^t goes to Squannungunick and to follow the parth that goes to Squannungunick to the mouth of Chickuppy River."

The first mention of a road is in 1665:—

"Nathanell Ely and Rowland Thomas, Committee."

"A Highway Over Chickuppy River, should Goe above the Islands, about 20 Rods, whair the Indian Common Wading Plaice is, or still higher on this side

of the River. It is to goe near Rowland Thomasses."

In 1662 Mr. Pyncheon deeded a part of his farm to Samuel Chapin. Later we find grants of land from John Pyncheon to Japhet Chapin, one of two hundred acres, one of twelve, and one of fifteen, all lying "north of Chickuppy River, and east of Connecticutt River," and all bordering on land which Japhet already owned. This makes probable the accepted tradition that Dea. Samuel had some time before deeded his land to Japhet.

Henry seems to have bought his land directly from Mr. Pyncheon. In 1659, we find him bargaining for 200 acres "on ye north side of Chickuppy River, half of ye upper Island, and five acres of mowable meadow." For this he is to pay "twenty pounds in wheat at current prices at four several payments," five pounds each year for four years. Although he lived on the south side, he owned land on both sides of Chicopee River. Some of this land remains in the families of his descendants to-day.

Mr. Theodore L. Chapin of Chicopee Street seems to be the only one now living on land directly inherited from his ancestor, Henry; but Edward and Charles Chapin, and probably Mrs. Naomi Chapin Ward, on the Granby road, own land which came to them from the same ancestor through five generations. Hundreds of our broad and beautiful acres have never passed out of the Chapin name, though they may not have come to their present owners by direct inheritance.

Sons and daughters were born to these brothers, and in a few years there were eighty-eight grandchildren. Other settlers came to join them. Before 1700 we find the names—Cooley, Crowfoot, Hitchcock, Wright, and Terry. John Crowfoot died young. Samuel Terry, who had married Sarah, a granddaughter of Japhet Chapin, went to Canada. Among the settlers at Skipmuck, we find the names of Phineas Stedman, John Stedman, Stephen and Gad Horton, and Ariel Cooley. Caleb Wright built a house on the north side of the river, but lived there only a short time, coming then to Chicopee Street.

The original deeds and grants were afterwards ratified by the town, probably to avoid dispute. Sometimes it was done in town meeting, sometimes by the selectmen, and sometimes by a committee especially chosen for this purpose.

This land had been fairly bought of the Indians. Probably they received for it much more than it was worth to them, for we do not find that they ever complained of the price paid. At first the Indians were friendly, and the relations between the white men and their Indian neighbors were not uncomfortable. But King Philip's war changed all this. Springfield was burned, and the towns on the frontier, Hadley, Deerfield, and Northfield, were in a state of continual anxiety.

Hannah, daughter of Japhet Chapin, was married in 1703 to John Sheldon of Deerfield. When she was preparing her wedding outfit, her mother was

careful that she should have a dress suitable to wear into captivity. Think of the heroism of a young woman going as a bride to her new home, in the almost certainty of captivity or death! The dress was made. It was of flannel, probably spun and woven by her own hands. Three months after her marriage, Deerfield was attacked in the night. In jumping from a window, Hannah sprained her ankle, and was unable to escape or to secure her dress. But a few days afterwards, she saw it on an Indian woman. With other prisoners she was taken to Canada, their footsteps staining the snow with blood, as they went. By the energy of her father-in-law she was soon redeemed, and brought to Chicopee to her father's home, from whence she returned to her Deerfield home. She was probably ransomed by the payment of twenty pounds, which seems to have been the price put by the French on their English women captives.

Greylock, the famous Indian chief for whom the mountain in Berkshire was named, was often in this vicinity. He had but one foot, having lost the other in a trap, so that his trail was easily detected, but he was never captured. His object seems to have been not so much scalps as prisoners, whom he sold in Canada.

A little girl in her trundle bed was roused one night from sleep by some one creeping from the window across the bed. Too frightened to move, and knowing that her safety depended upon perfect quiet,

she watched him while he helped himself to food from the cupboard. He left the house as stealthily as he came. It might have passed for the dream of a frightened child, but the empty cupboard confirmed the tale. The thief was Greylock, who was too hungry to be dangerous.

Skipmuck was attacked by the Indians. Some of the settlers were killed, and one or more taken captive. Aaron Parsons and Berijah Hubbard, two soldiers, had just finished cleaning their guns. They were saying, "Now we are ready for the dogs," when a young girl, who was spinning by the window, exclaimed, "They have come!" She ran, and in her haste and fright drew the latchstring from the door, shutting in the family. Lieut. Wright, who was at work in a shop near by, crept through a window and with this daughter escaped. The soldiers and one child were killed. One child, left for dead, revived and lived to grow up. Mrs. Wright was taken prisoner. The child was rescued by an aunt from Chicopee Street, Mrs. Thomas Chapin, who was a sister of Lieut. Wright.

The front door of the house built by David Chapin about 1705 was thickly studded with nails to prevent the Indians from splitting it open with their tomahawks. This house stood under the big elms on land now (1898) owned by Mr. Rowley, and was still standing in 1834. Samuel Chapin was fired upon and wounded while crossing the Connecticut River, returning from his work on the west side. But no

serious loss or injury seems to have come to any of the other settlers in Chicopee Street.

During these early years, we find Japhet and Henry Chapin leaders in public affairs. Japhet's name appears as selectman, assessor, and juror. Henry served on various committees and was deputy to "the Publick Assembly" at Boston. His integrity is shown in this, that while four pounds was allowed by the town to their deputies, he refused to take more than 34 shillings, insisting that this was all it had cost him. In 1687 Henry Chapin was one of those to whom was given the privilege to fish in Chicopee River, as far as "Schonungonunck fal or Bar." Japhet Chapin, Nathaniel Foote, Henry Chapin, John Hitchcock, and others, were authorized to build a saw mill at Schonungonunck Falls. In 1694 "Iron Works and a Blacksmiths' shop in Skipmuck" are mentioned, and also "a Corne Mill." Previous to this all the sawing and grinding had been done at the mills in Springfield. But with all the difficulty of drawing lumber so far, log houses were not common here as in many new countries. The dwellings were frame houses, many of them of two stories. Some were built with two stories in front, and one in the rear, with what was called a "linter" (lean-to) roof.

It has been said that after the burning of Springfield, the people here thought seriously of leaving, but the records do not show this. Other names appear, showing that settlers did not fear to come even in these troublous times. In 1683 Henry Chapin deeds

land to — Riley on the west side of the river. It is said that Riley was an Irishman, and with other settlers who came to that vicinity, gave the name of Ireland Parish to that part of the town. Before this, it seems to have been known as "The Upper Wigwames," showing that an Indian settlement was near.

In 1712 the County Road was laid out from Hadley to the lower end of Enfield, and "it is advised that it go by Mr. Japhet Chapin's Barn; that it be three Rods wide from Willimanssepp Brook Down Chickuppee Plain, to Mr. Japhet Chapin's Barn, then Four Rods wide, then south cross Chickuppee River, then westerly to Mr. Henry Chapin's and southerly Four Rods wide." This followed what is now known as "the Old Road" to Willimansett and McKinstry Avenue. A road was also laid out "on the West side of the Greate River."

These county roadways were gradually taken under the care of the town, and in all grants of land, especial mention was made, "not to hinder or prejudice the highways."

The first mention of a school in Chicopee is in 1713, when the munificent sum of ten shillings is paid by the town to "Daniel Cooley's daughter for keeping school." There had been schools in Springfield, since 1641, but it was impossible for the smaller children and inconvenient for the older ones to go so far.

We find Province laws and town laws regulating the schools. "All children are to be taught to reade, and learn a catechism." "Children and servants"

are to be sent to school. "All children from five to ten years of age to be sent to school, and if not, their parents shall pay to be rated (taxed) for all such children to the School Master." In 1714 a grant of 12 pounds was made by the town, "To the farmers of Chicopee and Skipmuck towards the schooling of their children for the year ensuing." The next year, "The Upper Chicopee, The Lower Chicopee and Skipmuck" were "allowed Precincts for three years," and a grant was given to each for a school. But in 1721 they were united in one Precinct. About this time the first schoolhouse in Chicopee was built on Chicopee Street on land owned by David Chapin. It was a one-story building, unpainted, with a huge fireplace, and stood until "The Old Red Schoolhouse" was built in 1761. Every parent was required to furnish one load of wood, "to be brought to the schoolhouse in October," and "no scholar shall have any benefit of the wood until they bring their proportion."

Some have questioned if "all children" included girls as well as boys; but the traditions of our grandmothers and great grandmothers tell us of their going to school with their brothers, certainly in the town of Springfield, if not in Boston.

The first grant of money to Ireland Parish for schools was in 1731. The first schoolhouse built there by the town was in 1772. The next year it was "voted, to build a schoolhouse in that part of the town where Aaron Ashley lives." The first

schoolhouse built by the town in Lower Chicopee was erected in 1773. The first schoolmaster is said to have been a Mr. Shevay, an Irishman and a minister, who occasionally preached to the people on the south side of the river.

Much has been said of the hardship and poverty of those early days. Hardship there was, and plenty of it, but it was cheerfully accepted as a part of the experience of a new country. Of poverty, in the sense of suffering for the necessities of life, there was little; for we must remember, that many things which are necessities to us were unknown to our grandparents. Game and wild fowl abounded in the woods. The rivers were full of fish. Salmon were sold, "at the river for 6d.; in the village for 8d.; shad 1-2d. at the river; 1d. in the village." A few years later, Erastus Morgan and five other men caught in one night 6000 Shad and 90 Salmon. Every householder was required to keep at least three sheep. These and their fields of flax supplied them with clothing and bedding.

We even read of a dressmaker in those early days. She did not send to Paris for her fashions, but they might have been brought from London, since new colonists from the mother country were continually coming to the Connecticut Valley. Every young girl was taught to spin, and the stronger ones learned and practiced weaving, both plain and fancy, according to their skill and taste. It is true, that some of their table furnishings were of wood, and others of

pewter, but the wood was scoured to a beautiful whiteness, and the pewter might have been silver for its brightness.

Mrs. Thomas Chapin, a matron of those very early days, said that she had two sons who were too rich to be comfortable, Abel and Japhet; one, Thomas, who was just about right as regarded property; and one, Shem, who was too poor. This Mrs. Thomas was a very generous woman, and when reproved by some of her family for giving away eggs, replied, "The more I give away, the better my hens will lay."

Abel, whom she called too rich, was afterwards known as Landlord Abel. He built the first house in Willimansett, on what is known as the Briggs lot, east of the railroad station. About 1730 he removed to Chicopee Street, and built the house now owned by Josiah A. Parker, and known as the "Uncle Moses place." It is the oldest house now standing in the city of Chicopee, with the possible exception of the Snow House in Johnny Cake Hollow, the age of which is not definitely known. Landlord Abel's house was at first of three stories; that is, with a gambrel roof. Here he kept a tavern for many years. A few pages of his account book have been preserved. They are interesting as showing the habits and customs of the day. The entries are principally of what was sold at the Bar. "Rhum and Cyder," "bowls of Punch and mugs of Flip," with occasional items of "Shugar, Seed-corne, Salt, and Molasses, lodging,



HOUSE BUILT ABOUT 1730 BY LANDLORD ABEL CHAPIN.
In recent years known as The Uncle Moses Place.

meals and horse-keeping." The "Bill for the Committee, sent by the Gen'l Court to lay out the Bounds of the Parish," is,—

	£	s	d
to three horses, oates and hay,	0	15	0
to three bowls of punch,	0	15	0
to three meals of victuals for the Com. at 5s per meal,	0	15	0
to one mess of oates and two bowls of punch,	0	10	0

The inventory of Landlord Abel's estate comprises, "Five hundred acres of Land, Five Houses and Barns, Horses, Cows, Sheep, and Hogs, Hay, Grain, Farming tools, Six hives of Bees, Household furnishings, including Iron, Pewter & Brass ware, with some China and Glass." There are "Thirty-six Linen Sheets, Sixteen Blankets, Eleven Woolen Sheets, Six Table Cloths, Twenty-one Towels."

We find in his wardrobe,—

2 Great Cotes,	a Black Velvet Vest,
1 Strait Body Cote,	1 pare Velvet Britches,
1 pare Lether Britches,	9 pare hose,
1 pare Shues,	4 fine shirts,
4 pare pumps,	6 common shirts,
1 Hat,	Shoe Buckles.

His library was,—

One greate Bible,	One Large Bible,
One old Bible,	Law Book,
Barnard's works,	wats Psalms & himes,
Robinson Crusoe,	Mather on Congregational
One Cubbord partly of books,	principles,
Sundry old Books Bound & Sundry Pamphlets.	

He had one "Negro Man."

These are only a very few of the articles mentioned in an inventory of over six hundred items. His personal property was valued at about 400 pounds; his real estate, at nearly 1300 pounds. The rich brother remembered the poorer one, for among the items is the valuation of a small farm given by life lease to "Shem Chapin & his wife."

Benjamin Chapin settled his own estate during his lifetime, with the exception of his personal property. He gave his wife a jointure or marriage settlement at the time of their marriage. He gave his land to his sons, as they "came of age" and married. By will he gives to his sons, "all my Husbandry Tools, and implements of what sort or kind soever." "To Benjamin, My Gun, my Sword, my belt, my Great Bible, and my province Law Book." All the rest of his movable and personal estate he gives to his daughters. His books were,—

Mr. Vinson on the sudden appearance of Christ to Judgment,	
A Pious soul thirsting after Christ,	
Doct. Watts sermons on various subjects,	
Doct. Mather's Meditations on Death,	
Doct. Increase Mather, on the Lord's Supper,	
Confession of Faith,	Josephus' History,
One great Bible,	One Law Book,
3 old Pamphlets,	Six old Books.

John Chapin, Jr., a bachelor, who died in 1747, had a large estate: "Houses and lands" in Chicopee and Brimfield, "cows, Oxen, Steares & heffers,"

"Horses & Hogs, Saddles & Bridles," money & notes, "ingen corn, Wheat & Righ & skins," and a Negro man named Pompey. He had coats and jackets of "Camlet, serge, and Broadcloth." He had "Some shirts, some more shirts, & some fine shirts." He had "Shoe Buckles, nee Buckles, and one gold ring."

Among the interesting records of these old days showing the custom of the time is the following Indenture:—

"This Indenture witnesseth, that I, John Chapin of Springfield, in the County of hampshear, in ye province of ye Massachusetts Bay, in New England, husbandman, have with ye free consent of my son, Asahel Chapin, put and do, by these presents, put my son, Asahel Chapin, an apprentice to Josiah Chapin of Springfield, in ye County aforesaid, Blacksmith, to learn his art, trade or mystery, after the manner of an apprentice to serve him from the twenty-seventh day of September last untill he is one and twenty years of age.

All which time ye s^d apprentice his master shall faithfully serve, his secrets keep, his Lawful Commands gladly everywhere obey, he shall do no damage to his master, nor see it done by others, without giving notice to his master; he shall not waste his master's goodes, nor lend them unlawfully to any, he shall not contract matrimony within s^d time; at cards, dice or any other unlawful game he shall not play, whereby his s^d master may be damaged in his own goodes, or the goodes of others. he shall not absent himself day or night from his master's service, without his leave, nor haunt ale houses or taverns, or play-houses, but in all things behave himself as a faithful apprentice ought to do during s^d time.

And the s^d master shall use his utmost endeavor to teach and instruct s^d apprentice in ye mode or mystery he now followeth, viz., the trade of blacksmithery, & to teach him to write, and ye rules of arithmetic, so he shall be able to keep a book of ac-

compts, & also provide him sufficient meate & drink, washing and lodging fitting for an apprentice during ye s^d time, and to find him two suits of apparel at ye end of ye term, ye one for Sabath and ye other for weak day, & for ye true performance of every one of s^d covenants & agreements, either of ye s^d parties bind themselves to the other by these presents.

in witness thereof they have interchangeably put their hands and seals this twelfth day of September, one thousand seven hundred and thirty-eight, and in the eleventh year of our Sovereign, King Gorge the second, of greate britian, france and ireland, King, &c.

JOSEPH CHAPIN,
SARAH VAN HORN, } witnesses.

JOSIAH CHAPIN.

We are sure that Asahel fulfilled most faithfully his part of the covenant, for we find him later with the Massachusetts troops at Louisburgh, "cheerfully enduring the extreme hardships of the siege. For fourteen nights they were yoked together like oxen, dragging cannon and mortars through a morass." Here Asahel died, but whether in camp or in battle, history does not say. His cousin, Nathaniel, also died there about the same time, 1745.

For more than sixty years, the people of Chicopee continued their connection with the old First Church in Springfield, finding their way on foot, or on horseback, fording the Chicopee River, at the Indian Wading Place, or sometimes going by canoe down the Connecticut. The Sabbath services and the weekly lectures were their edification and delight. Their lives were regulated by its ordinances and discipline; and, when death came, they were laid to rest in the

old Burying Ground, at the foot of Elm street, on the banks of the Connecticut. The names of Japhet and Abilene, his wife, may still be seen on the old headstones in Peabody Cemetery. They were removed when the building of the railroad made it necessary to discontinue the old burying place. The faithfulness of these people in going to meeting was wonderful. Mr. Ezekiel Chapin said, that for twenty-six Sabbaths in succession, he went regularly to Springfield to meeting.

The first allusion we find to any public religious service, in this precinct, is in 1728, when a meeting of the local churches is held here—either in the school-house, or in a private house. From time to time an occasional lecture or Thanksgiving sermon was preached, and as the people grew stronger, money was raised for preaching during the severe cold of the winter.

In 1749 the precinct had 40 voters. The qualification for voting was "40 shillings income, or Forty Pounds Estate." They began to think of a separate church and minister. Settlers had come to Ireland Parish who were ready to join them. They had shared the perplexities of Mr. Breck's trial and settlement in Springfield, and had seen the church grow strong under his ministrations. The Mother Church was about to build a new Meeting House. A petition was sent asking leave to withdraw. The petition was dismissed. The Church in Springfield was unwilling to lose these faithful men and women, who

had contributed so much to her growth and prosperity.

In the Autumn the matter was again agitated, and the Committee of the First Parish replied in this curious manner:—

"It's very evident by their (Chicopee's) Shewing that their Accommodations which they have obtained by being so far off from the Center of the Parish is more than a Compensation for their Fateagues on the Sabbath, for it is a very plain case that, if the rideing on Horse Back on a Plain six miles in half a Day is more than equall to half a Day's labour, the Petitioners on the whole Live with much more Ease & Less Fateague than those who live in the Center of the Parish; who besides the Fateague they have in managing their business at a Distance all the week, are obliged to build & maintain Three Large vessels to Transport the Produce of their Lands to y^e stores."

The meaning of this seems to be, that, for the privilege of living on their own farms, and cultivating the rich meadows near their own homes, our Chicopee farmers could well afford to travel six or even seven miles on the Sabbath to attend meeting. The homes of the Springfield people were principally on what are now Main and State streets, and their farm lands were "at a distance," some of them across "the Greate River."

But the Chicopee people were in earnest. In 1750 another petition was sent, this time to the General Court.