

IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN PAXTON'S PAST

1) Charles Paxton (1707-1788)



Little is known about the early career of Charles Paxton, who was born and grew up in Boston. In 1760 he became the surveyor of customs for Boston Harbor, a thankless job that involved searching ships for contraband and pressuring his neighbors to pay the customs duties set by Parliament. As a result, Paxton, who was perceived as living in luxury and currying favor with the British, was immensely unpopular in Boston.¹ In 1766 he was chased out of the country by an angry mob after he allegedly searched a merchant's warehouse without a warrant.² In London during the following year, Paxton helped form a Board of Commissioners, a group of five men who worked together to enforce British customs laws in Boston. He returned to Massachusetts emboldened with new powers. However, by February 1768, he sought help from his superior in England, writing: 'The Merchants of the first Character in this place openly run whole Cargoes of Wines and Molasses &c. in defiance of the Law and the Custom-house officers, and there is no power in the Government to prevent them. 'Tis the opinion of the wisest men here that unless we have immediately three or four men of rank and at least one Regiment everything will be in the greatest confusion and disorder.'³ The following month an effigy of Paxton was hung from the 'Liberty Tree,' after he seized the cargo of one of John Hancock's ships. This incident led Paxton to repeat his request to have British troops sent

to Boston to help restore order. Paxton's call for military support is regarded as one of the earliest actions leading to the hostilities that erupted in 1775.⁴ Once the Revolutionary War was underway, Paxton was officially banished from Boston. He fled to England in 1776 and remained there for the rest of his life. In 1785 and 1786 he submitted claims to the crown for losses incurred during the war, including property in Connecticut and 'valuable pictures from Italy, old and valuable furniture and a large library of books, neatly bound and gift.

(Reference: American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, MA.)

This portrait was left behind by Paxton or a member of his family during their flight to England. In the nineteenth century it was thought to be by the Boston artist John Singleton Copley (1738-1815). However, a 1908 restoration revealed the partial signature of John Cornish, an English portrait artist, and the painting was re-attributed to him.

A copy of this portrait by John Cornish was presented to the town of Paxton by Ledyard Bill, a resident and State Senator, and hangs in the Historical Commission office.

Eventually the much promised Revere bell was obtained for the church when Deacon David Davis brought it home by ox cart in 1835.



Revere bell in Congregational Church bell tower

2) Reverend Silas Bigelow (1739-1769)

Silas Bigelow was born in Medway and lived in Concord and Shrewsbury and became Paxton's first minister in 1767. He lived on Asnebumskit Hill and was much loved by his flock. Sadly after only two years, he died suddenly. His gravestone is regarded as one of the finest early American slate gravestones due to its intricate carvings.

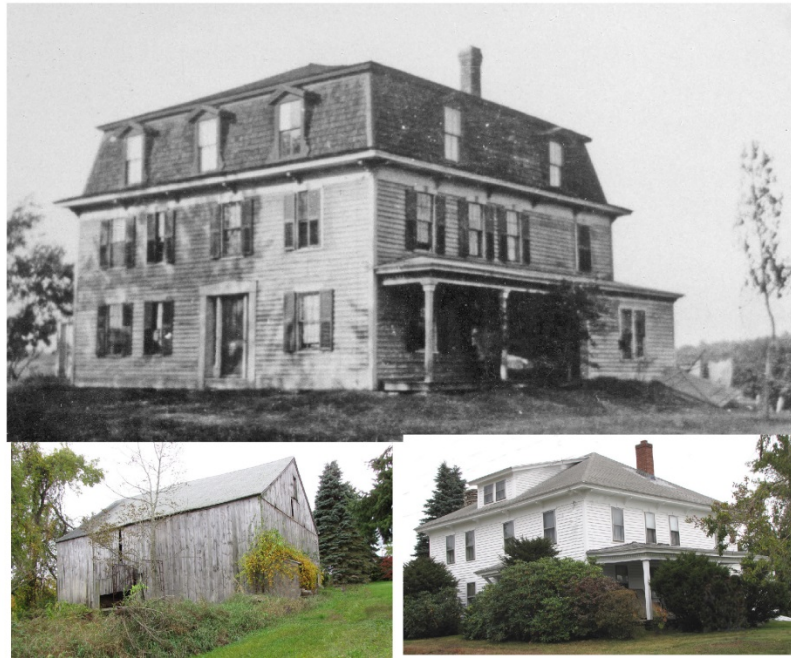


3) Major Willard Moore (1743-1775)

Political insurrection in the colonies began in 1774 at which time Willard Moore was among the men who marched on the Worcester Courthouse to protest England's heavy hand on taxation of goods. As a Captain of the Minutemen, he and his neighbors met at the Paxton Tavern when word arrived of the British attack at Lexington and Concord. At Battle of Bunker Hill he briefly took command with the deaths of other colonial officers. He was wounded and died after instructing his men to leave him. He is immortalized in an early painting by John Trumbull, *The Death of General Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill*.



He is buried at Bunker Hill but has a monument in the Center Cemetery.

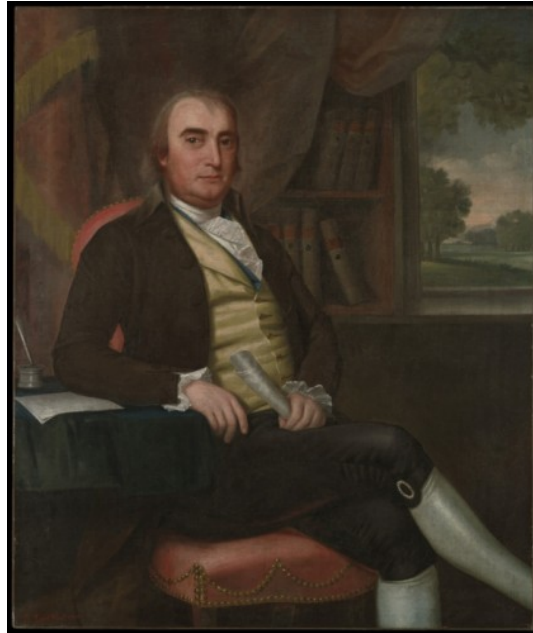


Major Willard Moore homestead on Richards Avenue before its demolition. The Moore Family homestead was extremely large and encompassed both sides of the street. Eventually a large portion of the land would be purchased for use as two cemeteries, Mooreland Cemetery for Paxton residents and Worcester County Memorial Park Cemetery for Worcester and surrounding communities use.



Major Moore monument in Center Cemetery

4) Ralph Earle (1751-1801)



Portrait Painting by John Davenport in Yale University Art Gallery

Ralph Earle was the son of Capt. Ralph Earle of the Continental Army and lived with his family at the corner of Pleasant St. and Grove St.



He was a Tory and fled to England during the American Revolution to study portraiture with Benjamin West and Joshua Reynolds. He was able to combine English formal portraiture with early American vernacular painting, creating an original style that reflected the spirit and vibrancy of America. He became one of

America's great early painters. His work has been displayed in many renowned art museums worldwide.



Early Ralph Earle historic painting



Early portrait by Ralph Earle

5. Charles Boynton (1812-1899)



Charles Boynton lived his life in Paxton working as a carpenter who was well read, frugal, and forward thinking. With a sense of posterity and a love of Paxton, he left his farm and savings to the town. He deeded 90 acres of his land to Worcester for \$1 to become Boynton Park for the use of Worcester and Paxton.



Additional funds were also left to the Center Cemetery and the Congregational Church. He also requested donated funds be used to establish a small brick fireproof building to safely preserve town records.



Records Building

6. Ledyard Bill (1836-1907)



Few people have done as much for the town throughout its history as Ledyard Bill. He was born in Ledyard, Connecticut and married into the Earle family. He was charmed by the scenic beauty of the sleepy boot making town. As a State Senator he funded and supported developed in Paxton including its first library

and donating land for its town hall. As a historian, he completed a detailed history of the town, *History of Paxton*.

7. Aaron Occum (19th century)

Aaron Occum is remembered in the 19th century as the last Native American in Paxton. He was popular with residents and was known to hunt and fish in the traditional manner. He plied his trade of basket and broom making from his home on the southern end of Turkey Hill Pond. During cold winter days, he visited the local farms including the Howe Farm on Brigham Road where he entertained his hosts with tales of his people. On one icy cold night while returning to his home, he slipped and suffered a deadly injury.

8. Daniel Estabrook (1832-1904)



Estabrook is an example of typical Paxton residents in the early 1800s. Like many local Paxton farmers, in order to add some much need funds for his family, he also worked as a part time cobbler at home using the leather supplied by boot

factories to construct them on his own cobbler's bench. Women also worked in this field.



The Bigelow Boot factory was one of several in Paxton during the 19th century. Paxton was very involved in the manufacture of shoes (brogans) for the Union Army during the Civil War. For a time in Paxton's history, more residents worked in the boot making industry either full time or part time than as farmers.

9. Ellis Richards (1848-1929)





Ellis Richards' home

Notice the prepaved dirt roads, Richards Ave. and Maple St.

A wealthy businessman from New York City, Mr. Richards spent many an enjoyable summers in the cool tranquil beauty of Paxton and its hills. He later purchased one of the town's oldest and finest homes and moved to Paxton permanently. He expanded and paved the road onto which he moved the house, eventually becoming Richards Ave., and planted many shade trees along it. In 1919 Richards donated the land it had stood on to the town and offered funds to build a new fire proof library. He donated an extensive library of books and established a Trust for its continued development. On October 1926, Richards Memorial Library was opened to the public. Trustees were selected to oversee it.



The original building above was enlarged in 1978 into its present size.

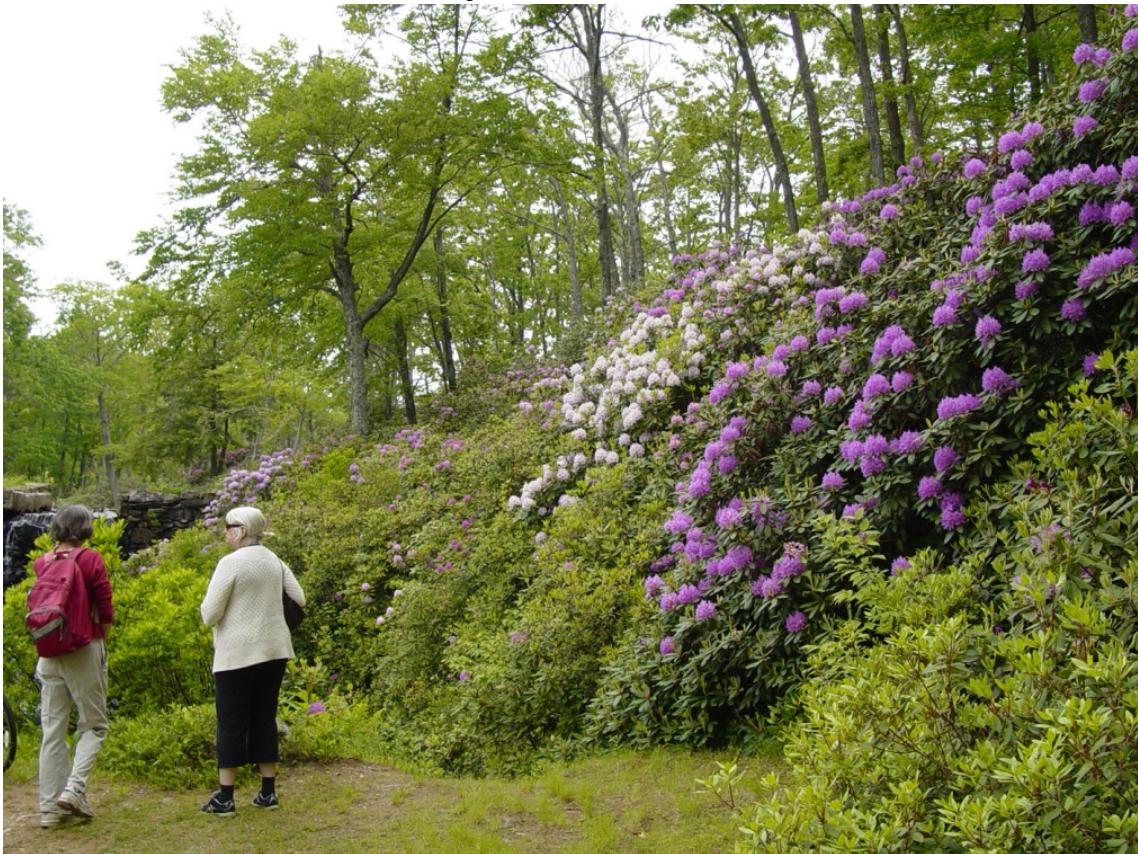
9. Florence Morton (1875-1953)



Original Morton home enclosed the early wooden mill school house.

Morton was a spiritual visionary who was very affected by the state of wounded soldiers from WWI. She dedicated her life to promoting world peace. In 1930, having been very attracted to the natural beauty of Paxton, she purchased the

Eames Mill property. She was one of the first women in Massachusetts to earn a degree in Landscape Architecture. She used this knowledge to create a retreat for contemplation and the study of her Baha'i faith. Two town roads into the land were closed and the old sawmill was remodeled into a teahouse. A Swiss chalet was built and extensive plantings of rhododendrons and azaleas began. In 1946 the property was sold to a wealthy Worcester family, the Spauldings. They were prominent in the city's business district, owning a well-known downtown department store for generations. It is said that when Connie Spaulding first saw the property in Paxton, she thought it was so beautiful that it must have been enchanted and so she named it "ENCHANTA." She was an active member of the Worcester Garden Club and the Massachusetts Horticultural Society and enthusiastically added to the beautiful flower plantings. In 1965 the state of Massachusetts purchased the land and called it Moore State Park in honor of Major Willard Moore. Years later in 1991 a picturesque wooden bridge was constructed over Turkey Hill Brook and called Enchanta.



Many thousands of beautiful flowers adorn the park during early springtime.



Eames' Saw Mill



Early Grist Mill before its removal



Swiss Chalet in 1966 before its deconstruction



Enchanta Bridge was built in 1998.

The story of today's Moore State Park includes at least five 18th- and 19th-century watermills that were powered by Turkey Hill Brook, which cascades 90 feet over a 400-foot run. The gristmill and sawmill were built as early as 1747. Remnants still exist there of the old mill village including a triphammer, quarry, a schoolhouse enclosed by the Morton home, and tavern. Today Moore State Park's over 737 acres

have become a very popular site with thousands of annual visitors enjoying its peaceful trails and gorgeous blooms of rhododendrons and azaleas.

