

THE OLD

163

MORTON AND TAYLOR

ESTATES

IN DORCHESTER, MASS.

BY
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THE OLD MORTON AND TAYLOR ESTATES IN DORCHESTER.

A YEAR or more ago there appeared in some of the papers of this city, and in one at least of our monthly magazines, descriptive accounts of the Taylor mansion and estate on Dudley Street in Dorchester, which had then just passed out of the hands of the Taylor heirs, and the ancient and elegant mansion was about being demolished. These accounts contained the assertion that the Hon. Perez Morton, whose death took place in 1837, lived the greater part of his life and died on that estate. Although scores of living witnesses, including some of the direct descendants of Mr. Morton, could then attest the fact that for many years he lived, and finally died, in the Pavilion, so called, situated in the northerly part of what is now Pleasant Street; and although an effort was made to correct the mistake in one paper where it had appeared, the assertion was still persisted in. Being desirous that the truth in the matter should be ascertained from some unquestioned source, I afterwards spent what few leisure moments I could command in looking into public records, and was enabled to make out from them a tolerably clear and I think correct history of the ownership and occupation by Mr. Morton of the two estates mentioned, of both of which it is now certain that at different times he was the owner and on which he resided.

Mr. Morton's residence, after his marriage in 1781, as we learn from the Boston Directory of 1789 and other reliable sources, was in Boston, on the lower corner of State and Exchange Streets, the site now occupied by the Union Bank. The first authentic document found connecting him in any way with Dudley Street in Dorchester, is a deed bearing date Oct. 11, 1794, and recorded in Norfolk Reg. office, Lib. 3, fol. 159,—by which deed Samuel Bird, of Dorchester, for £200 conveys to Perez Morton, of Boston, a piece of land "bounded S. W. on the public road leading from Boston to Dorchester Meeting-house [Dudley St.]; S. E. on land of William Humphrey and Mary Bird; N. on land of Samuel and Ezekiel Bird; and N. W. on road leading to Dorchester Point [Cottage St.], containing by estimation four acres more or less." To this was added by deed of April 6, 1796 (Lib. 16, fol. 143), two quarters and 11 roods of land adjoining, conveyed by Samuel and Ezekiel Bird on condition that Morton keep certain fences in repair; and by another deed, Jan. 11, 1802 (Lib. 16, fol. 142), William Humphrey conveys to Mr.

Morton, for \$200, half an acre more of contiguous land, "bounded north on said Morton's land or garden."

During the eight years embraced in these three purchases of land, Mr. Morton had erected a house thereon, into which he removed, probably from State St. in Boston, and in which he lived until a period not later than 1808. For he was already in possession, by right of his wife, of a more extensive and attractive piece of land in the town, a mile or less to the Eastward—known as Allen's Plain—a perfectly level and open tract of some 12 or 15 acres—to which he seems now to have turned his attention and on which he was apparently spending his money. This would appear by the fact that on Sept. 27th, 1803, for \$14,100 he mortgaged to his brother Joseph Morton his whole Dudley Street estate, comprising, as the deed says (21-49), "all that my estate in Dorchester on which my dwelling-house now stands, together with all the land, appurtenant and belonging thereto, which I purchased of Samuel Bird and Ezekiel Bird [boundaries given as above], containing by estimation five acres more or less, with all the buildings thereon standing," &c. &c. This mortgage seems never to have been discharged. And here terminated Mr. Morton's connection with the Dudley Street estate; for by deed bearing date of July 7, 1808 (Lib. 31, f. 190) Joseph Morton conveys to Cornelius Coolidge of Boston, in consideration of \$15,000 to be paid by said Coolidge in seven yearly instalments of \$2,142.85 each, "all that estate in Dorchester on which the dwelling house now stands *late in the improvement of Perez Morton, Esq.*, with all the appurtenance thereto belonging, and buildings thereon standing, said premises, however, subject to the Equity of Redemption of said Perez Morton as by law is in such cases made and provided." All these annual instalments were promptly paid by Coolidge, the last one in 1815, and the mortgages discharged. The right of Redemption by Mr. Morton seems not to have been exercised, so that in 1815, Mr. Morton having moved away certainly as early as 1808 (as shown above), the estate was in the sole possession of Cornelius Coolidge, who became the occupant of Mr. Morton's mansion and lived in it for many years. On the 17th of January, 1817, Mr. Coolidge, in consideration of \$18,000, conveyed by deed (Norf. Reg. 54-78) to Barnabas Hedge of Plymouth, Mass., his estate situated in Dorchester, with the dwelling house and buildings standing thereon—bounded as already described, containing by estimation about six acres and a quarter of an acre—being all the premises, as he says, "now occupied by me." On July 31, 1820, Mr. Hedge, in consideration of one hundred shares of the Bank of the United States, transferred to him by Samuel Appleton of Boston, conveys, by deed (63-174), to Mr. A. this same estate, with boundaries as before, containing about six or seven acres—"meaning to convey all the premises formerly owned and now occupied by Cornelius Coolidge, which were conveyed to me by him" Jan. 17, 1817. On Sept. 10, 1828,

Mr. Appleton, in consideration of \$12,000 paid him by Nathaniel Cogswell of Dorchester, conveys to him by deed (76-119) the "premises formerly owned and occupied by Cornelius Coolidge and by him conveyed to Barnabas Hedge, and by said Hedge conveyed to me by his warranty deed of July 31, 1820." On Oct. 1, 1828, Nathaniel Cogswell, gent., in consideration of \$12,700 paid him by Charles Taylor of Boston, gent., conveys to said Taylor (26-270) "an estate in said Dorchester, with the dwelling-house and buildings standing thereon and all the land appertaining and belonging thereto"—bounded as in previous deeds, being six or seven acres more or less—"being the premises formerly owned and occupied by Cornelius Coolidge, by him conveyed to Barnabas Hedge, by said Hedge to Samuel Appleton, and by said Appleton conveyed to me by deed," &c. And in 1890, Charles A. Welch and Wm. J. Lovering, trustees under will of Chas. J. Taylor, for \$48,000,—additions having been made to the estate in 1841 (Norf. Reg. of Dds, 129-235),—conveyed (Suff. Reg. Deeds, Lib. 1915, fol. 561) to Cheever Newhall the estate in Dudley Street with boundaries as given above, containing, as by plan, 218,311 sq. ft.

The exact time of the removal of Mr. Coolidge from the house in question after 1820 is not known, but his residence in Boston is given in the Directory for 1832 and subsequent years, showing his removal from Dorchester before that time.

The possession by the Mortons of the Pleasant Street estate dates back to a period more than a hundred years ago. Its various transfers by deed through the trusteeship of some of the prominent men of Boston, from the time in 1785 when it was owned by William Allen, and whose dwelling-house was burnt thereon in 1784,* which land was long used as a training field, may be in part gathered from the following extracts from a deed dated June 6, 1830, and recorded in Norf. Reg. Deeds, Lib. 92, fol. 107:

"Whereas William Sullivan of Boston, Esq. [son of Gov. James], conveyed unto Sarah Wentworth Morton, wife of Perez Morton, Esq., on the 26th of May, 1816, a certain piece or parcel of land in said Dorchester, bounded as follows:—Beginning at a point on the northerly side of the road which runs easterly by the public burying-ground [now Stoughton St.], whereby the land hereby conveyed adjoins the land of William Bird, and from said point running by said road easterly 535 feet more or less, then turning northerly and bounded easterly on the road [Pleasant St.] 1440 feet more or less, to the corner of another road [Cottage St.], which is a cross road leading westerly by the estate now in the possession of Mary Champney . . . and on this cross road bounded northerly about 380 feet

* "1784, May. Mr. Jonathan Clap's house was burnt, and the fire flew from his house to Mr. William Allen's barn, which was a quarter of a mile, which caught in his dung heap and set his barn on fire, and then his house, and burnt them to ashes, with most all his furniture, with three horses and all his carriages."—*Diary of Col. Samuel Pierce, of Dorchester, in "History of Dorchester."*

more or less, then bounded westerly on land in possession of said Mary Champney and by land of said William Bird 1390 feet more or less to the place of beginning—Being the same lot of land that was set off to Frederick Gryer upon a judgment of the Court of Common Pleas recovered against William Allen the first Tuesday of January, 1785. And whereas the consideration mentioned in said deed executed by William Sullivan, Esq. to Sarah W. Morton, wife of Perez Morton, conveying to Sarah W. in fee the estate aforesaid arose out of the avails of a certain house and land situate in Bowdoin Square, Boston,* which was given by deed to the said Sarah W. Morton, then bearing the name of Sarah Apthorp, by her grandmother Grizzell Apthorp, and afterwards sold by the said Perez Morton and Sarah W. Morton to John Trecothick Apthorp, Esq. And whereas the said Perez and Sarah W. Morton, in her right, she being the legal and equitable owner of said real estate, are disposed to grant and convey the same real estate in trust to the end and for the purposes hereinafter expressed—Now know all Men, that we the said Perez and Sarah W. Morton for and in consideration of one dollar to us in hand paid by Wm. Sullivan, John T. Apthorp and Nathaniel P. Russell, Esq., of Boston, do hereby give, bargain, sell and convey the same real estate unto them the said," &c. "in trust nevertheless, and to the uses, purposes, &c. in this Instrument set forth, &c.—that is to say, to permit the said Perez and Sarah W. Morton during their joint lives to use, occupy and improve the said real estate or to lease the same and receive the rents and profits thereof," &c. &c. In the remainder of the deed provision is made for Mrs. M. if she survive her husband, and other conditions secure to her the right of finally disposing of the estate. Notwithstanding all these transfers, provisions, &c., apparently for the security of the estate to the Morton family, Peter C. Brooks, acting as trustee, after the death of Mr. Morton in 1837, by deed dated July 20, 1838, confirms to Mrs. M. for her own use all the estate which had not been otherwise disposed of. Various transfers of the property took place after Mr. Morton's death and during his widow's residence on it, but it is not part of the writer's plan to continue further a history of its ownership and occupation. Mrs. M. died in Quincy, May 14, 1846. She was a lady of well-known literary merit in the early part of this century, was author of a volume of poems and also of various miscellaneous articles in prose and verse, and of a work entitled "My Mind and its Thoughts."† The families

* In Suff. Reg. of Deeds (Lib. 191, fol. 57), 1799, is recorded a deed by which John Trecothick Apthorp, of Cambridge, conveys to Samuel Parkman of Boston, for \$3,500, "a house and land" in Bowdoin Square,—doubtless the estate referred to above. Many now living can remember Mr. Parkman's residence in one of the two large stone mansions fronting the open square (built by him after purchasing the estate), with his son Dr. George Parkman's house in the rear on Cambridge Street.

† Mrs. Morton was also the author of "The Power of Sympathy or the Triumph of Nature," 2 volumes, 12 mo., published by I. Thomas & Co., Boston, 1789. It was advertised in the *Independent Chronicle*, Boston, January 22, 1789, as published that day, and was

of herself and her husband were connected in various ways with the leading characters of the time, and the Pavilion where the Mortons resided—in itself a unique and most attractive building—was for many years the centre of a brilliant array of men and women conspicuous in law, literature and fashion. Being brought up myself in its near vicinity, I well remember it and its inmates from my earliest years, and can now distinctly recall the aged Morton couple seated on their broad piazza and enjoying the south-westerly summer breezes as they swept across the open plain. The Pavilion was taken down not many years after Mrs. Morton's death, and—delightful as the location is—no dwelling-house has since taken its place. Its site is within a stone's throw of the spot where stood the first rude thatch-roofed meeting-house of the Dorchester emigrants, and on the first street in the town laid out by them, for many years known as Green Lane.

The story of Mr. Morton's occupancy of the two estates in Dorchester, as shown by the abstracts of public records above given and plain inferences therefrom, may be briefly summed up as follows:

After the purchase of his first lot of land on Dudley Street in 1794, he erected on it a mansion house, removing into it from State Street, Boston, and occupied it for ten or more years, vacating it, as has been shown, certainly as early as 1808. This house was evidently no mean affair; for the estate itself, which a very few years before had cost the purchaser a comparatively small sum, was in 1803, after the house was erected, mortgaged for \$14000, and in 1808 sold for \$15000. There can scarcely be a doubt that this valuable house was no other than the well-known building, which, having been occupied for three quarters of a century afterwards in succession by Coolidge, Hedge and others, and finally by the Taylors, has been latterly known as the TAYLOR MANSION.

Before moving away from Dudley Street, Mr. Morton would most likely have erected another house ready for occupancy, and as the Pleasant St. land has been shown to have been then in possession of his wife and himself, it is natural to suppose that he built thereon, and that the house erected was no other than the PAVILION,* in

called, probably correctly, the "The First American Novel." The second American novel was, I presume, "The Coquette, or the History of Eliza Wharton," by Mrs. Hannah Foster, first published at Boston in 1797; the third and fourth, "Wieland" 1798, and "Arthur Mervyn," 1799, both by Charles Brockden Brown. Then follow in 1801, but in what order I do not know, "Female Quixotism: Exhibited in the Romantic Opinions and Extravagant Adventures of Dorcasina Sheldon," by Mrs. Tabitha Tenney, Newburyport; and three other works by Brown: Jane Talbot, Edgar Huntley and Clara Howard.—EDDTON.

* The house, according to my imperfect recollection of the details of a familiar object seen daily from infancy, comprised an extensive square lower or ground story, with a broad piazza in front. A second story, still smaller in floor surface, rested symmetrically on the centre of the first, with both stories low studded. It was a common report in my boyhood, that another story still smaller in extent once crowned this second story, and that the peculiar shape of the structure was copied from buildings in countries where hurricanes are frequent. The building, as now remembered, had the appearance of having been painted of a dark greyish color.

which it is well known he resided the latter part of his life, dying there Oct. 14, 1837.

A few words may be said about the Hon. Perez Morton himself. He was born in Plymouth, Mass., Nov. 13, 1751; Harv. Univ. 1771; Speaker Mass. Ho. of Rep. 1806-1811; Attor. Gen. Mass. 1811-1832; del. to State Conv. 1820. He married, May 24, 1781, Sarah Wentworth Apthorp, who was born in Braintree, Mass., Aug. 29, 1759, and died in Quincy, Mass., May 14, 1846. In 1789 they were living in a house in Boston on the lower corner of State and Exchange Streets—the former site of the Boston Custom House. The deed by which this “brick mansion house,” as it is therein called, with land and outhouses thereto belonging, was conveyed to Mr. Morton (Suff. D., Lib. 148, fol. 189), bears the date of 1784. The grantor was Thos. Apthorp, of London, late of Boston, who for “£150 lawful money of New England,” conveys the property which his late father Charles W. Apthorp, who was a loyalist, formerly held. Eight years before this transaction, Mr. Morton was brought conspicuously before his fellow citizens. In April, 1776, ten months after the battle of Bunker Hill, the body of Gen. Joseph Warren was found and identified. The masonic fraternity, of which he was a conspicuous member, at once made arrangements for the funeral ceremonies, which took place at King’s Chapel, on the 8th of April. Perez Morton, then a promising young lawyer and a mason, was selected to deliver a public address on the occasion. As Mrs. John Adams wrote at the time,—“A young fellow could not have wished a finer opportunity to display his talents.” The oration was well received, and did much credit to the orator. His startling apostrophe to the exhumed remains before him—“Illustrious relics! What tidings from the grave? Why hast thou left the peaceful mansions of the tomb, to visit again this troubled earth?”—must have deeply stirred the hearts of his audience. From that time Mr. Morton took rank with the leading spirits of the Revolution. Long afterwards, one of his latest public duties was acting as State’s Attorney, assisted by Daniel Webster, in the celebrated trial of the Knapps at Salem, 1830, for the murder of Capt. Joseph White.