

That Old Silverbrook Farm in Acushnet

In this series of articles, I hope to broaden the scope of historical focus that includes the Old Dartmouth Region. While these articles are hosted on New Bedford Guide, we do have accompanying sites of Fairhaven Guide, Dartmouth Guide, and a slew of others. It's not material is running fry, because that will simply never happen, but that there are a multitude of members from the surrounding towns and cities.

It's natural to be proud of your heritage, nation, ethnicity, state or city you claim origins from. We'd like for every member to be able to equally bask in that limelight. This author currently resides in Acushnet, so thought it fitting to choose Acushnet as the first surrounding town to focus upon. I am also a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) shareholder and have had an interest on the history and background of the farm, in particular the old, massive barn that I drive by so often. So let's take a trip through Acushnet's history and see what we can uncover about The Silverbrook Farm. You can follow The Silverbrook Farm on Facebook [here](#).

Cushena, Cushnea, Cushenagg, and 50 something other variants. The Silverbrook Farm in Acushnet has a direct tie to the earliest settlers in the nation and region. The property is deeply steeped in rich local and national history. The first arrivals of English – Baptists, Quakers, and Puritans – needed to be fed and this demand was supplied by the scores of farms during Acushnet village's founding years. Acushnet seemed almost from the beginning to be intentionally chosen to be the area designated as the agricultural spot to feed the local region in general, and eventually the growing city of New Bedford specifically as it began to progress at a quicker pace

than its surrounding villages. The more history minded folks will recall that the region was originally called Dartmouth Plantation or well, just Dartmouth, and included the villages of New Bedford, Acushnet, Fairhaven, Westport and *Dartmouth*. I've even come across a few mentions that Tiverton and Little Compton were also encompassed by the term.

Acushnet was first dubbed Cushena, Cushnea, Cushenagg, and 50 something other variants. It was one of the first spots chosen to settle since the Mayflower arrived for one critical reason: the Acushnet river. Any pioneers looking to settle an area must first find a source of water out of simple necessity. Hygiene can't be maintained, smithies can't forge steel, crops can't be nourished, life can't be sustained *period*. It is no wonder that the oldest sites anywhere in the New World cropped up at the head of a river, along the river or where there was a pond, lake, brook, or spring.



Head of Acushnet River – Courtesy of New Bedford Whaling Museum

The site where The Silverbrook Farm sits has a spring that *still* robustly issues water. That alone suggests that even though there are no records proving that what is now 934 North

Main Street was one of the very first spots to be settled in the mid 17th century, it would have been considered prime real estate. The first structures in the area surely cropped up here.

Gosnold, Cushenas, and the Cushenagg “Naighbourhood.”

Indeed, Franklyn Howland mentions in his fount of knowledge ‘*A History of the Town of Acushnet, Bristol County, State of Massachusetts*’ that Bartholomew Gosnold’s crew likely passed through “Old Acushena” in one or both their visits in 1620 and 1621. The “Cushenas” were a small band of peoples within the Wampanoag tribe that lived on both sides of the Acushnet River in what is today, Fairhaven, Acushnet and New Bedford. The name of the area that the Cushenas lived in was called *Cushenagg* and the river called *Acushenagg*. In the day of the early colonists the territory was called Cushnet Country, Cushenagg Naighbourhood or Cushena Plantations.



Hamlin Street Dam – Courtesy of
N.B. Whaling Museum

By 1640 some of those off of the Mayflower were already making efforts to purchase strips of property within these territories from the local Amerindians. Governor William Bradford’s memorandum states some had purchased property: “...2 miles to ye Western side of ye said river to an other place called *Acushente* river which entereth at ye Western end of *Macata*...” *Macata* being the local word for West Island, Fairhaven. Of course, it wasn’t until November 29, 1652 that

"Acushnet" was officially deeded and purchased from sachem Wesamequen and his son, Wamsutta for *"...30 yards of cloth, 8 moose skins, 15 axes, 15 hoes, 15 pair of breeches, 8 blankets, 2 kettles, 1 cloak, 2 quid in Wampum, 8 pair of stockings, 8 pair of shoes, 1 iron pot and 10 shillings in another comoditie."* Quite a deal for 115,000 acres of land, wouldn't you say?!

Immediately after this purchase settlers migrated to Acushnet from the Plymouth and Duxbury colonies. Only 5 of the original 36 people who purchased the territory were known to have specifically relocated to the Old Dartmouth region. Most only purchased the land to resell for a quick profit as soon as possible. Those five were Samuel Hickes, John Cooke, Samuel Cuthbert, William Palmer and a "Miss Jennings." Of these five, only John Cooke is known to specifically come to Acushnet, most choosing Fairhaven Village as residences. However, in researching this article I may have come across a link between Miss Jennings and The Silverbrook Farm. More on her later. By 1694 more people began to choose Acushnet as home and 56 people were known to have brought their families to the region. The specific people were Arthur and John Hathaway, Samuel Jenney, Samuel Spooner, John Spooner Sr. and Jr., and Joseph Taber.

The "first comers" to Acushnet were puritanical and highly religious folk. To leave the relative safety of the Duxbury and Plymouth colonies and strike out with little security or guarantee of success into a wild, untamed land full of beast and likely hostile natives would require some pretty strong faith! Most of these earliest buildings no longer stand, not because they were of poor quality, or couldn't stand the test of time, but because the first homes were simple log cabins. The first prospect to be undertaken in a new territory would be to find the aforementioned waterway and clear land. The byproduct of land clearing is obviously trees and stones. The trees were used to build the homes and as fuel, and the stones

were used to build those mortar-less stones walls that are so common in the area and New England in general. For more info on this land clearing and the history on those stone walls read Those Old Stone Walls from our sister site Dartmouth Guide.

Refuge in Four Local Garrisons

Another reason why many of these buildings did not stand the test of time is because of the breach of agreement between both parties when the deed was drawn up.



Richard Davis' Four Corner Variety Store & Post Office –
Courtesy of N.B. Whaling Museum

The colonists agreed to allow the natives to freely hunt and allow their cattle to graze unhindered. In return the sachem agreed to have those within his tribe, the Cushenas, leave the territory within one year. Locally these agreements were broken by both parties in varying degrees and once the King Phillip war erupted, most of these isolated homes were doomed to be ransacked and burnt to the ground. Indeed, Franklyn Howland states that most if not all the homes were reduced to ashes, so complete was the destruction. Of course, besides the homes, livestock, and any settlers that were greeted were swiftly dispatched. If it were not for the four local garrisons – Russell's Garrison at Apponegansett, John Cooke's

on Howland Road, Pope's on Sconticut Neck Road and one on Palmer's Island – Acushnet and all remnants of European settlement would have been wiped out in its entirety and perhaps set back for decades. Acushnet's residents specifically sought refuge within Cooke's garrison.

After the King Phillip war came to a conclusion, the settlers began to return to their lands and rebuild. By 1700 saw mills and smithies were built which allowed a transition from log cabins to framed and shingled houses. Some of these oldest homes were still standing by the time Howland published his book in 1907. He stated that Acushnet more than any town in Bristol County had more of these old homes still standing. Before roads were developed to any degree the only way to or through Acushnet were by Indian trails and one highway. The Indian trails were simple footpaths of 3 or 4 feet wide. The very first major trail through Acushnet was from Peak[ed] Rock coming from the Middleboro through Long Plain (now North Main Street) over Perry Hill towards the center of town. There are records from as far back as 1711 calling the street "long Plain Rode." Note the placement or lack of capitals.

Late 18th Century Onward

It is here in our story-line -somewhere in the late 18th century – that we encounter the property that is today The Silverbrook Farm at 934 North Main Street. Main Street wasn't always called Main Street and as you go back in time it was called Fairhaven Road, Plain Street, and even further back called Long Plain Road. The particularly massive barn that is familiar to anyone who commutes along North Main Street was built using hand-hewn wooden pegs which was the common method of the day in the late 1700s, early 1800s. This makes the barn between 200-225 years old and likely built a few years after the Revolutionary War. The barns and three sheds may have been built between 1871-1895.



"You could buy dry goods such as hats and caps, boots and shoes; food stuffs like Magic Yeast (which makes perfect bread), flour, grain, and groceries; various products for your horses, hogs, cows and sheep, stove and ranger grass, flower and garden seeds, furniture, crockery, glass, and tin."

It's difficult to say what the farm or homestead appeared like around the time of the barn, since no other structures or town records from that time exist. While it can't be proven with certainty who the first known resident at the Silverbrook site was, the first official records show it starts with Richard Davis Jr. (1847-1910?) He and his dad Richard Davis Sr. (1814-1877) both ran a Post Office and a general supplies and variety store called Richard Davis & Son's Four Corner Variety. *"You could buy dry goods such as hats and caps, boots and shoes; food stuffs like Magic Yeast (which makes perfect bread), flour, grain, and groceries; various products for your horses, hogs, cows and sheep, stove and ranger grass, flower and garden seeds, furniture, crockery, glass, and tin."* In addition, he was assistant postmaster and postmaster for 16 consecutive years.

The site where the store was, started out as a furniture store by antecedent Jethro Davis in the 1700s, was handed to Samuel Wilde in 1830, burned down in 1859 before a new store being erected by Richard Davis circa 1860. Richard Davis Jr, married Harriet S. Clapp, daughter of Captain William Clapp on November 22, 1871. It is Harriet Davis who shows up as the first person to own the property on town records. Since there were a few buildings on the site, there were a few owners side by side.

Latham T. Jennings and “Miss Jenny.”

Also owning part of the land was a Latham T. Jennings (1838-1916) circa 1870 and he possessed a parcel 93.34 acres in size. Jennings was stonemason and contractor before becoming a constable and town surveyor (called surveyors of highways pre-1900) intermittently from 1868 to 1888. He is a lineal descendant of John Jennings who came to America in 1720 and it is unknown whether this Jennings owned the property before him. However, this brings us to the aforementioned “Miss Jennings”, one of the names on Governor Bradford’s 1652 deed purchasing the Old Dartmouth tract of land 115,000 acres large.



Silverbrook Farm Today – Courtesy of Silverbrook Farm

Miss Jennings was deeded a full share and possessed more than

3,000 acres. She is also one of five people were know for certain resided here as opposed to “flipping” the land for profit. Franklyn Howland states that this Miss Jennings was the widow of John Jenne and lived in Acushnet near Parting Ways, which of course is today’s Police Station. By 1694, fifty-six people had now purchased all the land originally deeded in 1652 and none of them were the five mentioned above. The Hathaways, Tabers and Spooners are families who owned this land and had intermarried with the Jennings/Jennes/Jenneys. It is here that we lose the trail from these Jennings to Latham T. Jenning that owned Silverbrook in the 1860s. Most likely the inter-marriages between these families passed these lands around.

We also know for certain that John Cooke had friends and family that specifically lived in Acushnet. John and his father Francis came over aboard the Mayflower and were original members of the Leiden separatist congregation. John was baptized in Leiden in 1607 and arrived in the New World at 13 years old. He lived right next to the Old Oxford Schoolhouse in Fairhaven. John died at Dartmouth on November 23, 1695 and was buried at Cooke Memorial Park, Fairhaven, Massachusetts. The Cookes also married into the Davis family coincidentally enough.

J.J. Pereira and Silverbrook Farm

Current owner J.J. Pereira bought the property in 1998 from Valeria Wolanski who was born in 1916. Her parents were Polish immigrants Frank and Anna Wolanski. They were dairy farmers who never made it past the 2nd grade, but ran a successful business because of a solid work ethic. They bought the land in 1931 in the midst of the Great Depression and Valeria inherited the farm in 1959 and was assisted by a friend of the family, a Polish immigrant Stanley Gupa. There are town records that bridge the gap from the Davis’ to the Wolanksi’s and current era J.J. Pereira, but this is beyond the scope of the article as there is scant historical bearing. The primary

home on the site today was built in 1945.

The farm was a spartan one as J.J. Pereira shared an anecdote about taking the property over in 1998 and that the only heat was by wood and gas stoves (by leaving the pilot light on) and there was one sole water faucet with cold as the only available option. It took until 2002 before he could update the property and move in.

Silverbrook Farm Today

The term “farm” in The Silverbrook Farm doesn’t accurately convey what it *really* is. It is so much more than a farm with a produce stand, CSAs and store. It is a community center, a movie theater, a place to sit on Santa’s lap and take a hay ride, site to host functions and birthday parties, an animal display and much more. J.J. Pereira and business partner Nick Ciaccio have a genuine, honest passion for what they are doing and this instantly conveyed within moments of being around them. They could easily have made a living selling bread, CSAs, produce and livestock. However, the extras like meeting Santa, the animal display, hayrides, family movie night and other activities aren’t looked at as ways to generate revenue, but extensions of the kind of people they are. They have an old world business ethic that demands you treat your customers and the community like family. You give more, extra and go above what is required.

Having an old world business ethic makes sense in more ways than the obvious. Not only is the site itself a direct link to the earliest settlements in Acushnet or Old Dartmouth, but the hard work, integrity, honesty, character and zeal of those original settlers is a living, breathing model that comes from Nick and J.J. If you traveled back in time to the 17th or 18th century you would come across a Silverbrook Farm with a Nick and J.J. working it. Well, sans pick-up truck and diesel tractors! In all other ways you are going back a few hundred years when you step foot onto that property. You just may be walking in the footsteps of the likes of Bartholomew Gosnold,

John Cooke, Latham T. Jennings, Richard Davis, J.J. Pereira or Nick Ciaccio. You are certainly rubbing shoulders with giants, yesterday's or today's.

I'd like thank Pauline Teixeira from the Acushnet Historical Commission for her generosity and help in fact finding and confirming. Any errors within the article are 100% that of the author and have absolutely nothing to do with the Acushnet Historical Commission. Also a very special thanks to the New Bedford Whaling Museum for the absolutely gorgeous photos. Without these photos, it would be one long, boring article! If you would like similar research done on your property, home or business, contact Joe or Mike Silvia at nbgarts@gmail.com.

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