

Sagamore Creek  
by Bruce E. Ingmire

One of the earliest settlers to Sagamore Creek was Thomas Walford and his wife Jane Walford. Thomas Walford had arrived in New England in 1623. He settled at Mishawam near Shawmut, later Charlestown on the Charles and Mystic Rivers. During his residence at Boston he lived amongst the Indians called the Aberginians and befriended their Sagamore, John. He was banished from Charlestown for non-conformity in 1631.<sup>1</sup>

Neal Salisbury in Manitou and Providence, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982, noted that John Sagamore was Pawtucket, Wonohaquaham, son of Nanepashement and his wife who upon Nanepashement's death was known as "Squaw Sachem." Wonohaquaham had a brother, Monowampate. Monowampate was called Sagamore James and led a Pawtucket village at Saugus.

Since no records have surfaced there is reason to speculate that Jane Walford was an Indian but there is no reference to such origins in the records. The close ties between Thomas Walford and John Sagamore could have been based on the bond of marriage. While the Virginia settlement lionized the story of Pocahantas and John Smith, the New Englanders took a dim view of Indians and association with them. Most Indians origins were suppressed in New England and that may account for the paucity of information on Jane's lineage which is so unusual for early settlers. Thomas Morton, New English Caanan, 31, notes that the Indian women were good midwives. Jane and her daughters bore many children and were midwives in the Piscataqua.

Thomas and Jane Walford left Mishawam and settled across from Rendezvous at Jerry's point, named for their son, Jeremiah. The Walford's remained in

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<sup>1</sup> Why this citation. William B. Shurtleff, Records of Massachusetts 1628-1641, Vol. I. (Boston, MA: From the Press of William White, 1853-1854), 85.

Portsmouth. Thomas died about 1666 and Jane until about 1670.

In 1649 they left their original homestead to their son and moved up the creek or cove the Walfords named for their old friend, Wonohaquham.

The earliest recorded use of the name Sagamore Creek is found shortly after the Walford's took up residence at the shore of the "Plains." It was recorded in Sampson Lane's 1651 deed to Ambrose Lane. William P. Upham, editor, Suffolk Deeds (Boston, MA: Rockwell and Churchill, 1880), 137. Jane Walford was accused of witchcraft in 1656 but exonerated by a three times Call????? Later Jane was again accused in 1670 by a surgeon named Robert Couch??? "Sagamores Creek" came to be called Witch Creek after Jane's reputation as a witch. This alternate name was underlined by the popular association between native leaders, chiefs and their shamans, witch doctors. Jane Walford, as an early resident of Shawmut was an associate of David Thompson. David had come to America in search of herbs. Jane learned Indian herbal medicine and practiced midwifery on the Piscataqua.

Colonial medicine was a tricky business. Yet the English came to trust the Indian remedies. Sir William Johnson during the French and Indian wars was taken to secret springs and saved from serious wounds by treatment with the spring waters at "Saratoga." Sir William Johnson was forever grateful. We do not hear of the medical remedies that failed for obvious reasons. Yet women in a world where blame was easily leveled, who failed in their medical practice, might easily fall prey to witch accusations. Reviled as outcasts and condemned as witches, Jane's daughters suffered from this English tradition of the healer. Also the daughters of helalers carried not only the information to share but the reputation that the daughters of accused or condemned witches harbored the potential for witchcraft. John Demos, *Entertaining Satan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

Jane Walford, Tom and Jane's daughter, married the husbandman Thomas Peverly. They lived on Peverly Hill across from the senior Walford's homestead on Sagamore Creek. Jane Walford Peverly boarded the accused witch Agnes Evans until that elderly woman's death. WPA Portsmouth Town Records ??????????. This provided further reason for the local tradition of calling Sagamore Creek, Witch Creek.

The Peverly family has an extensive genealogy but left out reference to their forebear, Jane Walford, the Witch of Portsmouth. Was the unstated truth of Jane's origin as an Indian or prejudice against the witch reputation suppressed by the succeeding generations? Henry Winthrop Hardin, Peverly Family: Thomas Peverly of Portsmouth, NH 1623-1670 and Some of his Descendents (Boston, MA: Privately printed, 1927).

The Walford family came to own a considerable portion, one-eighth of the land in seventeenth century Portsmouth. The land gave the family a status. Slanders of witchcraft were issued by those who coveted the land but those epithets never led to conviction. Carol Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), has argued that greed for land was often behind slanders and accusations of witchcraft in New England.

In 1680, another Walford daughter, Hannah Walford Jones, was accused of witchcraft in the infamous case of the Stone Throwing Devil. Richard Chamberlain, *Lithobolia: or, the Stone-Throwing Devil* (London, England: E. Whitlook, 1698). Land was very much a part of that case.

Thus the traditions surrounding the naming of Sagamore Creek and its reputation as Witch Creek. During this century, mapmakers using information assumed Seavey's Creek and Berry's Brook were Witch Creek. Also other maps taking a cue from Albee, called Jerry's Point, Jaffery's Point. Now each of you readers can point out those errors to your guests and visitors.