

THE PURCELL-LANGDON-LORD HOUSE.

The lot on which this house stands was in 1714 part of a thirty acre pasture belonging to John Hunking, of Portsmouth, styled mariner. On September fourth of that year Hunking mortgaged the pasture, and apparently all his other real estate, to George Jaffrey for £480.5.9, with an agreement that Hunking and his wife should retain possession undisturbed during their lives. The mortgage describes the pasture as adjacent to "the highway leading to the Plains" and "the high waye that Leads to Islington or a Place Called the Creek". Apparently the mortgage was never redeemed, for after Jaffrey's death, when his estate was divided among his children, in 1756, his daughter Ann, who had married Capt. Nathaniel Peirce, received as part of her share "Mrs Hunkings Orchard so called", which was bounded by the two highways and the Globe land.

Soon after this, the Peirces began selling off their inheritance. There are on record three deeds from them to Gregory Purcell. The first is dated Nov. 14, 1757, and conveys a lot of land measuring one hundred feet on what is now Middle Street, and one hundred six feet on a "New Street" lately laid out- now State Street. On May 29th of the next year, 1758, is a deed of an adjoining lot sixty feet on "the Middle Road", eighty feet on a "New way of twenty foot wide" between this lot and land of Charles Treadwell (now the Cutter place), and its east line running to the northeast corner of the first purchase. This second lot is the one on which the house stands. The third purchase was Aug. 24, 1761, and was a triangular strip, ten feet on Middle Street, next north of the previous purchases, running easterly on the "New Road" eighty feet to a point "at ye Northerly End of Said Purcells Stable". Whether the "New Road", (now Porter Street) had been

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moved between ~~1852~~ 1758 and 1761, or whether the distance to Porter Street was ten feet greater than first measured, and a new deed considered necessary to cure the discrepancy, does not appear. The total distance on Middle Street, which adds up to one hundred seventy feet, was reduced by the widening of State Street, some time prior to 1797, and the lot now measures one hundred sixty feet. Samuel Lord added to the property, to make its present area, in 1857, when he purchased of Thomas J. Coburn a lot measuring twenty three feet on Porter Street and sixty four feet on State Street.

It has been said that the Purcell house was built in 1780, but that date is erroneous. On the plan of the Jaffrey estate at the time of the division above referred to, in 1785, the lot is marked as "English Grass Land". Probably the Hunking orchard had disappeared. The division makes no reference to any buildings. As we have seen, Capt. Gregory Purcell, who built the house, did not purchase the land until 1757 and 1758, and had evidently built prior to 1761, when his stable is mentioned. On turning to the Portsmouth tax lists, now preserved at the City Hall, we find Capt. Purcell's town tax in 1754 to be £5. In 1757 it was £6.10. In 1758 and 1759, £14. In 1760 to 1763 it was £19 each year. There are two noticeable increases, in 1758 and 1760. The latter increase is apparently in the same proportion that appears in numerous other individual cases, so I infer that it is due to a change in the tax rate, and not to an increase in the amount of Capt. Purcell's property, and we therefore have left the increase in 1758, where the rate appears to be the same as in 1757, as probably due to the erection of the house that must then have ranked as one of the most imposing residences of the town. It is possible he began to build a short time prior to receiving the

the second deed, but after an agreement to purchase, but 1788 is approximately correct, and perhaps as near as we can determine the date of erection of the house.

Who was Gregory Purcell? He was in Portsmouth as early as 1754, when he is taxed, and was then called "Captain", undoubtedly master of a merchant vessel. Capt. Michael Purcell, who lived here 1758 to 1769, is the only other Purcell on our early records, and as he named his twin sons Michael and Gregory, it is natural to assume him closely related. In 1772 Capt. Gregory was President of the "Charitable Irish Society", which is evidence of his nationality. In 1759 he married Sarah Wentworth, daughter of Major John Wentworth, Judge of Probate and of the Court of Common Pleas, and brother of Governor Benning Wentworth. About this time Capt. Purcell retired from the sea and opened a store in his new residence. Here he lived until October, 1778, when he died, leaving widow Sarah and eight children surviving him. His will gives his property to his wife to use for the support and education of his children. As appears below, he must have left numerous unpaid bills for his widow to struggle with, and that may explain why she opened a boarding house.

The Revolutionary War was now in progress, and here was undoubtedly the genteel and fashionable place of residence for strangers sojourning in our midst. The taverns were patronized by transients, rather than by those making more extended visits. So at Adam Purcell's John Paul Jones stayed while in Portsmouth fitting out the Ranger in 1777, and again while supervising the building of the America, in 1781 and 1782, as is stated on the bronze tablet placed on the house by the Helen Seavey Quilting Party, in 1913.

But let us continue with the history of the house, which had
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been left to the disposal of widow Sarah Furcell. In March, 1783, she sold it for a consideration of one thousand sixty pounds, "lawful money", to Woodbury Langdon, Esq., leading merchant of Portsmouth, active patriot of the Revolution, member of the Continental Congress, and for a short time justice of the Superior Court of Judicature. It is evident Mr. Langdon did not get all he paid for, as in 1787 various creditors of Capt. Furcell, who had ~~was~~ waited with much patience since his death, proceeded to sue his estate and levy executions on the property the widow had sold. The estate of Mark Hunking Wentworth sued on a bill for goods bought between December, 1757, and November, 1763, Jacob Sheafe, Capt. James Stillson and Jonathan Verner had other bills of long standing. Dr. Hall Jackson collected for medical services to the family from 1761 to 1776. Elizabeth Wallingford had a note dated in 1778 for \$111.11.8, and there were other claims. The executions took all of the garden, and part of the kitchen and cellar of the house itself.

The property at this time was occupied by Henry Sherburne Langdon, son of Woodbury, above, and grandfather of the present Woodbury Langdon, whose generosity has aided the Historical Society so materially in acquiring and preserving this former family homestead. In 1796 his father deeded to Henry Sherburne Langdon what had survived the onslaught of the creditors, and during the next ten or twelve years the son bought up the execution levies. He lived here until April, 1810, when he sold to his younger brother, John Langdon, Jr. The latter was living in the house in 1851, when he conveyed it to his brothers-in-law, Henry and Alexander Ladd. John F. Parrott, then recently United States Senator, was the occupant in 1853, when the Ladds deeded to Samuel Lord, who took possession and lived there until his death in 1871.

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