

The Brick Trade in Early Haverhill

PART I

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IF we eliminate the rather commonly held thesis that bricks were brought over from England as ballast, the current existence of three eighteenth-century brick houses in Haverhill, Massachusetts, indicates that an early brick industry was located in this section of Essex County before 1800. The major questions to be asked are: who were the craftsmen, what was the nature of their trade, and what can existing buildings tell us about this early brick activity? Part I will deal with the craftsmen and Part II will concentrate on the three standing houses.

Documentary records indicate that at least five persons were engaged in the brick trade in Haverhill prior to 1800. In chronological order they are: Robert Hastings, Sr., mentioned as "Mason" in a deed of land near the eastern boundary of Haverhill to his eldest son dated February 13, 1706.¹ This same Robert Hastings with no occupation described was deeded property as early as 1682 in the east Parish of Haverhill. His eldest son, Robert Hastings, Jr., is listed as "bricklayer" in a deed recorded January 30, 1711.² The third individual mentioned as practicing the trade is Samuel Greeley listed as "Bricklayer" in a deed from his father Joseph Greeley "Yeoman." On August 2, 1759, a fourth name is found when the Proprietors' Acts and Deeds of Haverhill refer to "a piece of common land in said Haverhill . . . where John Hall makes bricks,"³ and later on February 7, 1761 John Hall is

labeled "brickmaker" in a grant of land in Haverhill.⁴ Finally, at the end of the eighteenth century an advertisement in a local newspaper, July 2, 1795, reads:

CALEB PAGE

would inform the public that he has a large quantity of bricks for sale in the east parish of Haverhill which will be sold at the lowest price, July 15, 1795.⁵

Robert Hastings, Sr., the earliest documented craftsman of the brick industry in Haverhill, apparently passed the skill on to his son Robert Hastings, Jr. I find no documentary evidence to support a father-son handed-down skill in the case of any of the other recorded craftsmen. The practice of the mason's trade seems to have been of a more general nature and often included more than the laying of brick. Hence we find on November 14, 1711, in the Proprietors' Acts and Deeds of Haverhill an indication of what the bricklayer's profession was like during this period:

to Robert Hastings, Jr. for procuring lime and bringing it in place for laboureres and dyett and doing ye mason work about ye parsonage house, for lathes and such bricks and clay for work provided he finish what mason work is yett necessary.⁶

In fact, in some instances there is an overt indication of other skills as well. For example; in the deed of property to Samuel Greeley "Bricklayer" mentioned above, the following passage appears:

"[I] also grant one quarter of that saw mill . . . which mill was built by my said son [Samuel Greeley]" ⁷

John Hall and Caleb Page also probably had other activities outside the brick trade as there is a recorded "John Hall, distiller" who appears in the grantee index⁸ shortly before the mention of John Hall, "bricklayer," almost certainly the same man, and a Caleb Page is mentioned as "Yoeman" in a deed on May 22, 1793,⁹ which places him in the east parish of Haverhill, where the bricks were for sale in 1795.

These latter sources suggest that the brick trade was not a pure trade handed down from father to son in the tradition of medieval craft guilds. The assumption that brickmaking itself was carried on only by artisans skilled in that industry is questioned by the following interesting passages from the Haverhill Acts and Deeds.¹⁰

Upon completion of Michael Emerson's encroachment and fencing in ye Townes common land unjustly and in particular having fenced in ye Brick-yard at ye head of his Lott and claims for his owne. . . .

March 7, 1698

The petition of Jonathan Shepard of said Haverhill, humbly showeth that there is a piece of common land in said Haverhill, lying between his land where John Hall makes bricks. Ye petitioner therefore prays that you gentlemen would give or sell him the said land or give him the liberty to fence the same for conveniency of fencing. . . .

May 1, 1759

We the subscribers being appointed a committee by the Proprietors of Haverhill to view, measure, and value a piece of land petitioned for by Jonathan Shepard, lying between his land where John Hall makes bricks; and we

find there to be about 1 Acre of land and we are of the opinion that it may be sold to said Jonathan Shepard . . . *always reserving free liberty for all persons in the Town of Haverhill forever to make bricks or to get clay and to go in and out at all times.* [Italics added.]

August 2, 1759

Thus we see that in 1698 the "Brick-yard" apparently had common usage. In 1759 it is made very clear that this one acre is to be used by all the people, and it is implicit that there were numbers of people making bricks. The location of this contested acre which is in the area of first settlement (1642) near the first cemetery suggests that bricks were commonly made here for use in chimneys of the earliest wood framed buildings long before their more sophisticated use in the small eighteenth-century brick "manor houses" which have survived in this area. The elements of common right to clay (and kiln) revealed by Jonathan Shepard's petition above also points toward brickmaking as being a common right and not a sole proprietorship in this area of earliest settlement.

The 1795 advertisement of Caleb Page represents a definite break with common right usage because he is selling merchandise. It also is revealing as a location of manufacture away from the original common lands, hence the possibility of private enterprise in use of other clay pits. The study of existing buildings and their relationship to these sources of supply should shed further light on the nature of the early brick trade in Haverhill.

NOTES

¹ Essex County Deeds, Book 22, p. 91.

² *Ibid.*, Book 24, p. 161.

³ Proprietors' Acts and Records of Harver-

hill, Massachusetts, typed manuscript, Massachusetts Historical Society, p. 565.

⁴ Essex County Deeds, Book 111, p. 202.

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