

The Parson Smith Homestead, South Windham, Maine

By NELLIE D. SPILLER

PETER Thatcher Smith, who built the Parson Smith House in Windham, Maine, was the son of the Reverend Thomas Smith of Falmouth (now Portland) and Susan Tyng, daughter of William Tyng of Woburn, Massachusetts, who were married September 12, 1728. His grandfather was Thomas Smith who on May 9, 1701, married Mary Corwin. His great-grandfather Smith, whose name was also Thomas, was a Boston merchant.

Peter Thatcher Smith's father, born March 10, 1702, became on March 8, 1727, the first minister of the first church in Portland when that community, then known as Falmouth Neck, consisted of no more than forty families. He continued in the ministry for the unusual period of sixty-eight years, preaching in turn until the close of the year 1784, and officiating in a portion of the services of the Sabbath until within two years of his death on May 25, 1795, as he had just entered upon his ninety-fourth year.

The Reverend Thomas Smith kept a diary, or journal, which began with the year 1720 and reached to the year 1788, a greater length of time, probably, than any similar record had been kept within the limits of the state. When the former Governor Sullivan was writing his history of Maine he applied to Mr. Smith for the use of this journal, in order to complete his account of the Indian Wars, etc., but Mr. Smith was unwilling to comply with his request because the journals contained certain private matters. Some time

after his death, contemporaries of the Reverend Thomas Smith urged that the diary be published. Samuel Freeman was persuaded, with the consent of Mr. Smith's surviving children (Peter Thatcher who died in 1826 and Sarah Codman who died in 1827), to make and print such extracts from it as he thought might be useful and entertaining.

This first edition of Smith's Journal was printed in 1821. A revised edition of 1849, known as *Smith's and Deane's Journals*, by William Willis, contains extracts from the journals of both the Reverend Thomas Smith and his assistant and successor, the Reverend Samuel Deane. In addition there are explanatory and biographical notes, biographies or memoirs of both these pastors, and historical notes concerning Portland from 1632 to 1849.

Speaking of the Reverend Thomas Smith, William Willis writes:

His duties were arduous, being extended over a wide territory . . . nor were his labors confined to pastoral duties; He was, I might say, equally devoted to those of the medical profession. . . . References to his medical practice are numerous in his journal, and show that his ministrations were as eagerly sought for bodily relief as for the solace and instructions of religion. That he was a blessing—an instrument of God to this people cannot be doubted. . . . He was a good scholar, a devout and sincere Christian, and well deserved the reputation which he bore for many years as the leading minister in this part of the country. . . . His wit and humor were fresh and free, and at times hardly restrained within clerical lines. And with these opposite traits

of character—this severe and earnest piety, and this exuberant wit—he had, closely allied, a practical business talent which kept him ever watchful over his temporal concerns, in the midst of his pressing calls for the spiritual interest of his people. He early seems to have had a taste for speculation in real estate.

Among the papers of the Reverend Thomas Smith was an inventory of his estate, in his own handwriting, taken in 1742 and reproduced by Mr. Willis, who concludes: "I give the whole of this paper not only for the interesting facts it presents, but for the graphic character and for the business talent it exhibits. And it can but create some surprise that an amount of property so large should have been accumulated in a space of fifteen years, from a salary so inconsiderable and so poorly paid as the paper shows it to have been. But the town was liberal to him in the supply of various wants; and the purchase of his lands was at a low price: for instance, the consideration in Samuel Cobb's deed of his three acres, in 1728, was but five shillings."

The Reverend Thomas Smith was three times married. His first wife, Susan Tyng, who bore his eight children, died October 1, 1742. She was a woman of admirable qualities, loved and admired by all who knew her. In a letter to a friend on the day of her death Mr. Smith writes: "Never did I see in any person a more remarkable tender conscience, afraid of the least appearance of evil. . . . I never remember to have seen any one thing in her whole life, that I could call a deliberate sin. . . . The people of this place all esteemed and delighted in her beyond anything of like kind that has been known; and if their wishes and prayers could have kept her alive, she had not died. You cannot conceive the grief and mourning her death has universally caused. Men women and chil-

dren appear strangely struck, as those that mourn for an only child."

Undoubtedly Mr. Smith found the care of his family of six living children (the oldest but eleven and the youngest not quite two years old) added to the burden of his other duties, too severe for him. On March 1, 1744, he married a widow, Mrs. Olive Jordan, whose husband had died two months after Mr. Smith's first wife. The second wife lived twenty years after this marriage, and died suddenly on January 3, 1763.

Mr. Smith's third wife was the widow Elizabeth Wendell whom he married on August 12, 1766, and who survived him. She was the mother of the wife of his son, Peter Thatcher Smith, and Mr. Willis notes that she was a lady of fine manners, good education and dignified deportment.

In his memoir of the Reverend Thomas Smith, Mr. Willis describes him as "short in stature, but pretty full in person, and erect. He lived until 1775 in the house built for him by the inhabitants, and for some years the best in town, which stood on Congress St., opposite the head of India St.; which two streets then bore the names of Queen, or Back street, and King street. The house was the first in town to receive the ornament of a house paper, which was put upon one of its rooms by nails; it was the last to burn in the conflagration of 1775, having caught from Capt. Sanford's, which stood on the corner of King and Congress streets, as he notes in his journal. He was taken from town that day with his wife, by his son Peter, and removed to Windham, where he resided through the war. On his return to town, he occupied the two story wooden house in which his son Thomas had lived, now standing on the corner of Wilmot and Congress streets, in which he died."

His death occurred on Monday, May 25, 1795, and he was buried on the following Friday. A funeral notice was issued the day after his death:

ORDER OF PROCESSION

To be observed at the Funeral of the Reverend Thomas Smith, senior Pastor of the First Parish, in Portland

He will be interred next Friday afternoon, The Funeral Procession to be formed at the dwelling house of the deceased

PROCESSION.

Male members of the churches in Portland
Officers of the Churches.
Ministers of Portland.

THE CORPSE.

Relatives of the Deceased.
Ministers of other towns.
Judges and Officers of the Court.
Male citizens.

Females.

CARRIAGES

The first bell to strike at half past one o'clock:
The second at half past two, and to continue till the procession shall arrive at the Meeting house.

DIVINE SERVICE

Will begin at three o'clock. 1. Anthem. 2. A Prayer. 3. A hymn. 4. An Oration. 5. Conclude with an anthem.

The Procession Will then move in the order above mentioned, by the Hay Market, to the place of interment.

May 26, 1795.

Mr. Deane, who had stood at his side for more than thirty years, delivered, on the Sunday after his burial, a discourse, giving a complete summary of the life and character of the Reverend Thomas Smith. An extract from his address follows:

In the varying scenes of life and in so long a course of years, it is no wonder that his afflictions have been great and manifold. He has not only paid the usual tax upon long life, being bereaved of most of his family and dear connections by death; but seen this flourishing settlement, his own house among the rest, a prey to devouring flames, kindled by a merci-

less foe. All which, besides many other trying providences, he has borne with the most remarkable fortitude and resignation. In addition to his other qualifications of a christian bishop, he was given to hospitality. In his better days his house has been the noted resort of

Providence, and did not consider his treasure as lying this side of heaven. In imitation of Saint Paul, he often sacrificed his right for the furtherance of the gospel.

* * * *

Peter Thatcher Smith, the second son of the Reverend Thomas, was named after Peter Thatcher, his father's friend and pastor of the New North Church in Boston. He was born on Falmouth Neck, now Portland, June 14, 1721. Of this event William Willis writes: "It may be mentioned here, as illustrative of the manners of the time and the smallness of the population, that all the married women upon the Neck were present at his birth and, with their husbands, were entertained at supper on the occasion."

Peter Thatcher Smith took his first degree at Harvard College in 1753 at the age of twenty-two. In a class of seventeen he placed sixth in dignitv, and was the survivor of all. Governor Oliver, the Reverend Dr. Dana of New Haven, and William Erving, an officer in the British army before the Revolution and a benefactor of Harvard College, were among his classmates.

After college Mr. Smith kept school a number of years while studying for the ministry, part of the time upon the Neck, and a considerable portion at Weymouth, Massachusetts, where he was invited to settle as minister and declined. He had preached occasionally at Windham where there had been no settled minister since 1754 when their first pastor, the Reverend John Wight, died. In 1759 Peter Thatcher Smith was invited by the people of Windham to preach with them six months, and in November 1761 he received an urgent appeal to return there. The writer of the letter, as Mr. Willis



THE REVEREND THOMAS SMITH
From a lithograph in William Willis' *Smith's and Deane's Journals* (1849).

foreigners and strangers from different parts of this country, and of his clerical brethren, where they were generously entertained. He knew what it was to devise liberal things, and feel for the unhappy. Ever charitable and tender hearted, his lenity toward debtors, and relinquishment of just debts and claims, have been such as might be expected only from one who placed his trust in the care of Divine

reports, urged that he should not be discouraged from coming "where you preached your first sermon to us, who always admired your person and your preaching to that degree that we resolved to make trial of no other man for our ministry till you absolutely refuse to accept of our call." The Proprietors of the town, which was not yet incorporated, contributed to the support of the ministry, and with their appeal united to that of the people Peter Thatcher Smith was persuaded to accept.

He was ordained on September 22, 1762, to the gratification of his father who wrote of the occasion: "A prodigious concourse of people, a great and admired solemnity. It was thought by all to be the most finished solemnity of the kind ever known." The whole population of Windham, then called New Marblehead, but incorporated the same year, consisted at that time of thirty-nine families. The services were held in the fort, for which the town voted that year to provide five windows. The fort stood but a stone's throw from the spot where Parson Smith built his house in 1764. An uncompleted meetinghouse standing nearby had been demolished and its timbers used to strengthen the province fort when, in 1744, the latter was built on the cleared portion of the ministerial lot, the highest point of land in the new settlement. Throughout his ministry Parson Smith never had a meetinghouse for his small congregation. Religious services were held in the fort which, after it was no longer needed as a refuge from the Indians, was used for general assemblies of the settlers. Here in one of the flankers was held the community school until the first schoolhouse of which we have record was built in 1772, just across the main road from the fort. All town meet-

ings were held in the fort until 1782 at which time it was sold at auction, torn down, and its timbers used for other building purposes.

From the tripartite agreement of September 21, 1762, between the Proprietors, the inhabitants, and the Reverend Peter T. Smith, as recorded in Book II of the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, we learn that Parson Smith was to receive "Eighty three pounds Lawfull Money" and a grant of 96 acres of the 100-acre lot No. 44 which had formerly been drawn for support of the schools. It was agreed that he should receive "Eighty pounds Lawfull Money per Annum . . . to be continued so long as he continue in the ministry at said Windham, as his yearly Salere for his support and maintenance." He was also given the use of the ministerial lot No. 33 on which he built his house.

In an account, dated April 26, 1759, of the progress of the settlement at New Marblehead it is made clear that on lot No. 33, the "Ministerial Lott," two acres had been cleared. From S. T. Dole's history of Windham we learn that "the first minister Mr. Wight owned Home Lot #34, and acquired by purchase the adjoining lot #35. He built his house on the latter, nearly opposite the Province Fort, and lived there until compelled by the Indians to take refuge with the other settlers in the fort. He remained there with them until his death May 8, 1753."

The same Book II in the Cumberland County Registry tells us further that on August 17, 1763, the Reverend Peter Thatcher Smith in consideration of 6 pounds, 13 shillings and 4 pence bought from John Wight of Marblehead (and later from other heirs their interests) Wight's interest in land inherited from his father. The property is described as

“Forty acres of land situate in Windham, being the land that was laid out for the Lots no. thirty four and thirty five in the first division of lands in said township called Home Lotts, bound southwesterly on the River, northwesterly on the

betwixt the Proprietors of the Town of Windham . . . and Peter T. Smith . . . [grants] to said Peter T. Smith . . . all the Ministerial Home Lot in said Windham called No. 33, being one mile in length and ten poles wide, having the



THE PARSON SMITH HOMESTEAD, SOUTH WINDHAM, MAINE

Photograph by *Portland Evening Express*, 1952.

Home Lot no. Thirty three, North easterly on a highway between the premises and the first division of one hundred Acre Lots, and South easterly on the Home Lott no. forty five.”

As stated earlier, Parson Smith built his house on the ministerial lot No. 33, but nowhere in the histories of Windham could be found any mention of his gaining legal title to this lot. For this information one must turn again to the Registry of Deeds. In Book VI on page 65 occurs the record: “This indenture made the nineteenth Day of October A.D. 1765

lot No. 32 on the North west side, and the Lot No. 34 on the south east, the Great River on the south End, and the main Street Running through the middle of the same.” In return Parson Smith exchanged twenty acres of that land which the Town had set off to him as part of his settlement, and designated as the Hundred Acre Lot No. 44.

Thus the Reverend Peter Thatcher Smith acquired both the ministerial lot and lots immediately adjoining to create the nucleus of his homestead, and although there is no specific mention of

the fact in the deeds there is no doubt but that his house was already completed. Tradition asserts that it was ready for his bride whom he married on October 8, 1765. She was Miss Elizabeth Wendell, daughter of Jacob and Elizabeth Hunt Wendell of Boston, and the marriage was performed in the Old South Church in Boston by the pastor, the Reverend Dr. Sewell. Elizabeth Wendell Smith, mother of the Parson's eleven children, died on October 16, 1799, and Parson Smith married for a second wife Mrs. Jane Loring, third daughter of Shrimpton Hunt, and widow of Dr. John Loring of Boston. Intentions were entered on the Windham town records September 12, 1801. She died April 20, 1824, aged seventy.

Mr. Willis notes, in his memoir of Parson Smith, that "after his dismissal Mr. Smith continued to reside in Windham, the remainder of his life, in easy circumstances, surrounded by his children and grandchildren, discharging the duties of a magistrate and a Christian man, enjoying the respect of the community and the serenity of a tranquil old age. Death at last came to him on the 26th of October, 1826, in his ninety-sixth year, to relieve him of this mortal life."

"He was a man of infinite humor which he was never anxious to restrain," continues Mr. Willis, "and free and agreeable address. He was tall and portly in his person, resembling more his mother's than his father's kindred; his venerable appearance in the costume of the by-gone age, his breeches, three cornered hat, and ample coat, attracted general observation, as he occasionally visited the town of his birth, over the ruins of which, after its destruction in 1775, he bitterly

grieved; and which drew from him a sermon preached in the old and shattered meeting house, soon after the sad event, from the venerable words, 'He beheld the city and wept over it.'"

Except for his serving as Representative to the General Court of Massachusetts in 1803, there seems to be little evidence of a "life of a magistrate." Like his father, Parson Smith early became interested in dealing in real estate, and the transactions continued until a month prior to his death. In an index book at the Cumberland County Registry of Deeds there are three full pages of entries recording transactions by the Reverend Peter Thatcher Smith of Windham. In addition to his extensive holdings in Windham itself he bought from his father 300 acres of land in Gorham, a part of "Peke's Island in Portland," and lands in North Yarmouth and Falmouth, and added considerably to land in Portland which had come to him as his share of his father's estate there.

In two separate instruments, January 17 and 18, 1816, Parson Smith made an agreement with his daughter Ann W. Barker and her husband, Charles Barker, by which the homestead in Windham was conveyed to the Barkers, "excepting, however, and reserving to myself the use and improvement of the above granted premises for and during the term of my natural life. . . ." Charles and Ann Barker, for their part, "do hereby consent and agree . . . that we will live in the house with the said Smith for and during the term of his natural life and during that time will take the whole care and management of the premises above described, and also of all the said Smith's other lands in Windham, and also the care and management of all the

household business and domestic concerns, and will conduct and manage and improve the same in every respect in a prudent, faithful and proper manner, for the use and benefit of said Smith, and . . . they will provide for the said Smith and his wife a suitable and convenient support and maintenance for and during the term of said Smith's natural life. . . ."

The Barkers were also bound by the terms of the agreement to continue to make a home there for the Parson's second wife, Jane Loring Smith, as long as she should remain his widow and wish to live in Windham. However, Mrs. Smith died in 1821 and Charles Barker died in 1822, both earlier than Parson Smith whose death occurred in 1826. Two years after Parson Smith's death, John T. Smith, executor of his father's will, held a "public vendue" of the latter's Windham properties, to help settle the estate. The Reverend Peter Thatcher Smith's son-in-law, Abraham Anderson, Jr., as the highest bidder paid \$402.50 for about fifty acres of land, "being part of the real estate occupied by said Peter in his life time." Though there is no reference to buildings, two of the boundaries (southerly by the Main Road and easterly by the road leading from the latter to Duck Pond) show that the Parson's house and other buildings were located on this piece of land.

Born June 19, 1758, Abraham Anderson, Jr., son of the fifth man to settle in Windham, married August 13, 1788, the Parson's daughter, Lucy Smith. Two years later she became her father's nearest neighbor when, through an exchange of property with his brother, Abraham acquired the Anderson homestead and moved into the house across the main road from Parson Smith's home. The

Anderson house, built in 1770, is still standing, though very much altered by the addition of Gothic detail in the nineteenth century.

When, in 1828, Abraham and Lucy bought at auction Parson Smith's Windham estate, the only one of their four sons and two daughters not already established (or about to be) was Edward, then aged twenty-seven. He was, therefore, the logical one to have his grandfather's homestead, while his parents continued to occupy the Anderson house across the way.

On April 24, 1828, Abraham sold to his son Edward two parcels of land which he had bought two days earlier from Ann Barker and which her father Parson Smith had conveyed to her on January 17, 1816, being land situated across the main road, and land with buildings situated across the Duck Pond road, from the Smith house. There is no recorded deed showing the transfer of the Parson Smith House itself (with its approximately fifty acres of land) from Abraham Anderson to his son Edward, but Edward took his bride there to live in 1830, as had his grandfather, the Parson, in 1765.

Edward Anderson married on November 30, 1830, Louisa, the daughter of Joshua and Olive Wilson Berry. He was a farmer and occupied the Parson Smith homestead throughout the remaining years of his life. He was one of the selectmen of Windham in 1829, 1834 and 1835, 1846, 1848 and 1849, and represented the town in the State legislature in 1844. He was interested also in the State militia, and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel.

Following the death of Edward Anderson, October 7, 1867, the property

was jointly owned by his widow and their three daughters, one of whom was married to Charles Goodell, a civil engineer. Soon after May 1868 the Goodells moved from Portland to the farm in Windham, and here Louisa, the youngest of their three children, was born April 23, 1871. She was the last baby to be born in Parson Smith's house, and she was destined to be the last survivor of that line of his descendants.

The Parson Smith House ceased to be a year-round residence in 1876 or 1877 when Louisa reached school age and Charles Goodell moved his family to Cumberland Mills, the easterly section of Westbrook. There his children could have better schooling and he would be nearer his work at the S. D. Warren Mills where he had recently accepted a position.

The Goodells and Andersons (Mrs. Goodell's mother and unmarried sisters) continued to live together as one family, spending the winters at Cumberland Mills and the summers at the farm in Windham, only three miles away. When Louisa married, she and her husband, Myron Parker, lived with the rest of the family, never having a home of their own. As older members of the family passed away, the survivors became joint owners of the Windham property until 1944, when Louisa A. G. Parker became the sole owner. Upon her death, December 5, 1952, the homestead of her great-great-grandfather, Peter Thatcher Smith, was, by the terms of her will, bequeathed to the Society.

This fine eighteenth-century house

was little altered through the years. Just when the ell was added has not been determined, but it is mentioned in a recorded family agreement of 1866. Original paneling and woodwork are intact in all but two or three rooms where mantels of the early nineteenth century have been introduced. On the wall of a closet in the dining room are remaining fragments of a fine pillar and scroll wallpaper which must once have covered the walls of the room. Among the more unusual features of the house is a wide closet beside the chimney between the parlor and the Parson's study, and opening from the latter by a single, very wide paneled door. Though the closet is now lined with laden bookshelves, there are some evidences to substantiate the family assertion that the closet housed the Parson's folding bed.

Built on the highest elevation in that part of Windham, the Parson Smith House looks out across cultivated fields to other well-kept farmsteads and to the Smith-Anderson Cemetery where lie buried the Parson and many of his descendants, including all who occupied his home. There is little to mar the impression of an eighteenth-century farm homestead, created in this northern frontier territory. Here is a well-preserved example of fine colonial architecture, built by people of outstanding background, people who not only helped to conquer the wilderness but brought to it many of the comforts, some of the luxuries, and much of the culture which they formerly had known.