

John Davenport's Rock

By THOMAS M. PAINE

Can any reader give additional information?

IN the southeast corner of Weston, Massachusetts, lies a much weathered boulder on which are carved the worn initials: J D. This rock apparently remained virtually unknown in the town until last fall, when two Weston residents were shown the rock by a friend. Positive identification of the puzzling inscription would be most appreciated.

Although most Weston residents and past historians never before knew that the letters on the rock existed, the Appalachian Mountain Club has been aware of the fact for over sixty years. In 1895 Edward G. Chamberlain, a member of the club, published an original survey of the Charles River and its tributaries. One of these AMC maps shows the bend in the Charles between Newton Lower Falls and Norumbega at Stony Brook and includes the location of the "Davenport Stone" at the present site of the "J D" stone. Chamberlain's subsequent map of the AMC walk January 6, 1912, to Hundreds Woods in Wellesley and "Davenport Rock" across the line in Weston provides further information: "In 1639 Governor Winthrop and Rev. John Davenport had an 'Outing' up the River." The caption goes on to say what a later AMC map says better and more fully: On the hillside about 1,000 feet directly west of the most western point of the Lower Charles Mr. Davenport cut his initials JD on the eastern sloping face of a stone overlooking the river. The stone is roughly pyramidal, 5 x 6 feet at

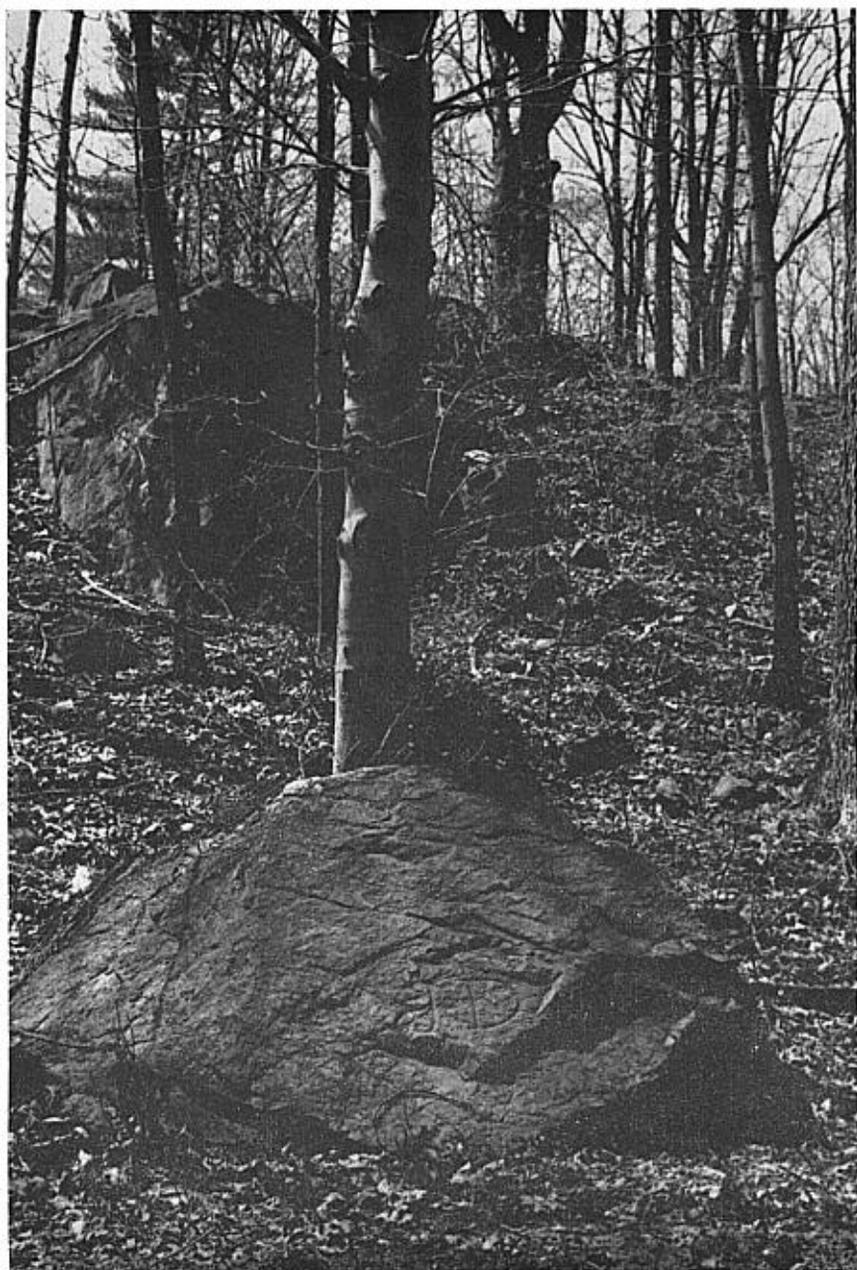
the base, 4 feet high. . . . The letters JD are 7½ inches high, still legible after 290 (now 328) years."¹

DID JOHN DAVENPORT PUT THESE LETTERS HERE? CAN ANY READER AUTHENTICATE THESE ASSERTIONS? (Research at the AMC house on Joy St. reveals nothing.) Davenport (1597-1670), Puritan clergyman, arrived in Boston, June 26, 1637, with his lifelong friend, London merchant Theophilus Eaton. The two stayed nine months, apparently advised by Governor Winthrop to find an inland location for a settlement of their own. Finally, Davenport and Eaton wrote Winthrop and the Massachusetts General Court, January 12, 1638 (if the new style date, otherwise March 12, 1637/38):

. . . And, whereas a place for an Inland plantation beyond Watertowne, was propounded to us, and pressed with much importunity by some, whose words have the power of a law with us, in any way of God, we did speedily, and seriously deliberate thereupon, it being the subject of the greatest part of a Dayes discourse: The conclusion was, that, if the upland should answer the meddow ground in goodnes and desirableness (whereof yet there is some ground of doubting) yet, considering that a Boate cannot pass from the Bay thither, nearer than 8 or 10 miles distance, and that it is so remote from the Bay, and from any towne, we could not see how our dwelling there would be advantagious to these plantacions, or compatible with our conditions, or commodious for our families, or for our freinds. . . .²

¹ From the map for the AMC annual reception, February 8, 1930.

² Winthrop Papers, IV, Mass. Hist. Society. 1944, p. 19.



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Thus, in April 1638 Davenport and Eaton sailed to the present New Haven, the colony they founded. Davenport is known to have returned to Boston just a few months before he died, March 1669/70.³

Before we assume that Davenport carved the letters, we would like to trace Chamberlain's source. Between the papers of John Winthrop and John Davenport only the reference just cited even implies the alleged outing. WHERE DID CHAMBERLAIN FIND "OUTING"? The source of that word alone could well authenticate the story.

IF DAVENPORT WENT TO FOUND A COLONY AT THE PRESENT NEW HAVEN IN APRIL 1638, DID HE RETURN IN 1639, THE DATE ON THE AMC MAPS, OR WAS THIS DISCREPANCY IN ERROR? The question is important, for the Eaton-Davenport letter would suggest an outing—not necessarily with Winthrop—between July 1637 and early January 1638.

Why the letters were carved is another question, answerable only by specu-

lation. If Davenport indeed visited the area to explore Winthrop's suggestion, could the initials have served as a claim to the land, in the event that Davenport decided to settle there?

One further complication arises: On the very day of Davenport's arrival in Boston, June 26, 1637, the area of southeastern Weston was allotted to the use of Watertown farmers, one acre per person. Could this have been the plain on the banks of the Charles, the present MDC golf course, some 100 feet lower than the rock Davenport had yet to inscribe? In July of the following year it was ordered that the area "shall be a common for cattle..."⁴ The wilderness of Weston had at last become farm land. From then on, none of the known property owners in the general vicinity had surnames beginning with the letter D.

Thus, while announcing the "rediscovery" of this landmark so long known only to the AMC, any measure of historical identification would be greatly appreciated.

³ Dictionary of American Biography.

⁴ Watertown Records in Lamson's *History of Weston*, p. 1.