

venient place for memoranda. There is a recipe for a sick horse. It is composed of sulphur, salts, saltpetre and tartar emetic, which looks as if the horse was sure to be sicker.

On the back cover there also appears this interesting jog for Stearns' memory: "Cow with the yellow tit went to bull 25th of March, to calve the 25th of December, 1830." It is to be hoped that this carefully planned Christmas present arrived according to schedule.

### VIII. THREE PUZZLES OF 1830

I FEEL considerable doubt about the meaning of three entries. The first is: "Permit for salt, one dollar." This was charged in 1833 against Amos Stow, who lived near the Canadian line. He is usually described as being "at the Bay," probably meaning the American side of Missisquoi Bay. Does this permit refer to a community deposit of salt, upon which customers could draw if furnished with the permit? Or was it a sort of grapevine arrangement with friendly people over the Canadian line who joined in winking at smuggling? There always has been petty smuggling along the northern Vermont border, and in 1809 when the embargo was on, there were some major operations in which Highgate men were involved. I am puzzled by the entry. I somehow think that there is more than meets the eye behind that entry. But what it is, I do not undertake to say.

The second puzzling item is presented by finding the phrase as a charge item—"To jumping an axe."<sup>8</sup> Several times this phrase occurs on the credit side of the book. When David Skeels jumped axes for anyone, the charge was a dollar a jump, but Conrad Saxe would jump them for fifty cents each. Both men had forges and it seems clear that "jumping" was a technical name for some process relating to forging. The *Century Dictionary* identifies the word "jump" as one of the terms in a welding process. I have found no axe manufacturer, blacksmith or logging man who has ever heard of the phrase. I suspect, or rather give a Yankee guess, that jumping an axe means that a piece of iron was tempered and laboriously made into a serviceable axe. What do you think?

The third item reads: "To making fiars, 50 cents." It is charged against Joseph Stickney. These "fiars" had nothing to do with

8. My inquiries about "jumping an axe" must have been made to more than a dozen people in the axe atmosphere. I never heard a responsive peep.



Darius Green, or with his successor "Wrong Way" Corrigan of our own time. The entry, dated March 1, 1830, might, I suppose, possibly refer to handmade flyers or warnings of a coming town meeting, since there probably was no printing office in town. That conjecture is offered in a desperate mood. Possibly "fliars" was a colloquial name for spigots, to be used in the maple sugar season about to open, but that also is a long shot. So I give it up, and pass the guessing on to my readers. It is nothing over which to lose any sleep. This "fliar," I may point out, is cheaper than those that usually are taken in the market. But why bring that up?

Some of the entries relating to spinning are unusual and a bit puzzling. We know, of course, that at this period much of the family clothing was produced in the home, perhaps all of it. A quaint entry is a charge of \$1.50 made against Conrad Saxe on May 1, 1824, for what he calls a "quill wheel." This, no doubt, is a quilling-wheel, used a century ago in spinning. The weaving instrument now has long been obsolete, both here and in England where it originated. At about this time the weavers of England were beginning to feel the economic pinch which later became a race between hand production and power production in which the last named was destined to ruin the weaving craft. In America the race was less ruinous because if a weaver could not ply his trade in this new country, he could readily turn to some other gainful activity. All that the above item about the "quill wheel" means is that in 1824-1833 some people in Highgate were practicing old-fashioned weaving.

About a month before the entry just discussed there is another one reading: "To moving my quill, cart & oxen, \$1.50." The charge is against Patrick Kirk, and the item possibly means that Stearns had loaned the quilling-wheel to Kirk and was bringing it back to his own home. These wheels were of two different types, one large, the other small. It permits the conjecture that the wheel in question was of the larger type.

There likewise is evidence pointing to the probable use of what are called "skarnes," an auxiliary weaving article. On January 23, 1825, Stuart Challis, who I believe lived in Swanton, was supplied with "18 spools" at ten cents each—\$1.80, one of the very few items in the book that is on a dime basis. These, I believe, were loom spools for a "skarne." This utensil is somewhat difficult to describe, and I simply say that it is a scarce type of weaving utensil, and the word means nothing to anybody of the present time. Alice Morse Earle,



our most gifted and competent student of colonial customs, complains in 1898 that the word "skarn" is not found in any dictionary, yet she says that she has seen it in plenty of advertisements issued in colonial times.<sup>9</sup> I can uphold her statement, for my Connecticut account book in 1768 mentions a "skarn." There are other spellings, such as "scarn," "skan," "skean" and "skayn." The word, however, never has been nabbed by a lexicographer. Why not? Why snub a skarn?

In Mrs. Earle's book there is a picture of a skarn with 68 loom spools. It is my belief that the 18 spools mentioned in Stearns' account book were for a skarn and were replacements for spools that had been damaged or lost. It should be noted that the date of the entry—in the middle of the winter—is just the time when shut-in country householders turned devotedly to spinning and weaving.

In my Connecticut account book a "quill wheel and swifts" are priced at two shillings, while a "pare of warping barrs and scarns" are priced at 12 shillings. A weaver's loom cost two pounds and 10 shillings. Quilling-wheels in Highgate cost more than they did in the Nutmeg state.

Hay is one of the commodities that always was plentiful, and yet sold at a relatively high price—I mean by the early Highgate standard. Hay was from \$6 to \$8 a ton, with \$7 a ton as the prevailing figure. He apparently had a large amount of hay, and as he had no barns and kept the hay in stacks in the fields, as many a Vermont farmer does today, he naturally sold as much as he could. These sales were in the autumn, but every year in February, or March, as I study the entries, he was saving some neighbor from distress. At this time of year, he often sold 500 pounds of hay, or half a ton, or even as low as 200 or 300 pounds of hay to some neighbor. Sometimes the entry is marked "X." This "X" mark, I feel sure, after some sleuthing, is his way of saying "exchange," for sometimes he writes beside the entry, "To be returned in the Fall." He helped out Peter Saxe with hay on several occasions.

Items relating to tobacco are fairly frequent. The price usually was 25 cents a pound, the form not specified, except in one case when it is set down as "plug tobacco." Perhaps this tobacco was raised in

9. *Home Life in Colonial Days* by Alice Morse Earle (1898), p. 216, has a description of a quilling-wheel, and on p. 229 are pictures of two different types of quilling-wheels. On p. 217 is a picture of a skarn with loom spools.



Lower Canada by Loyalists who formerly had lived in the Connecticut River Valley in the Nutmeg state. I know of no way of learning where the commodity originated. In my Connecticut account book in the year 1768 there appears a lot of items reading like this: "To a yard of tobacco, two pence." This would indicate that the leaves were braided green and then dried.

There is no mention of snuff in the Stearns' account book, but the taking of snuff in that town was a common practice and within fifty years goodly quantities were sold there by my father, and also in some of the adjacent towns. Believe it or not, there is a lot of snuff still sold in Boston at the present time. Until 1855 it was the custom in Massachusetts to have in the State Capitol in Boston at the Speaker's desk in the House, a large snuffbox for use by those who came up to the desk to confer with the Speaker. The slang phrase "to take a snifter," now applied to a drink, may have originated in the snuff habit. The snuffbox was banished by the "Know-Nothing party," as a blow at anything that had been tolerated by the Whigs.

In her recollections,<sup>10</sup> Mrs. Drury says that in 1835 at the Saxe store in Highgate there was a supply of Scotch snuff, which she observes "was kept on a high shelf." I can tell why it was placed on that high shelf. It was a custom that had grown up in the rural districts for customers to help themselves to a pinch of snuff from the jar on the shelf. This became such an annoyance that many store keepers felt obliged to adopt the device of placing the snuff quite out of reach. In 1869, when my father, Stephen B. Anderson, was a clerk in the Soule store at Fairfield Center, Vermont, he was asked by Mr. Soule, the proprietor, if he could not do something to stop a certain woman from tapping the snuff jar every time she came into the store. "I'll stop her all right," said my father. Whereupon he removed the snuff from the jar and filled it with cayenne pepper. In came the lady "snifter" and took a big pinch from the snuff jar. The result, as my father said, was that: "She sneezed her damned head off, and never bothered us again." In 1897, my father wrote for a newspaper his reminiscences of fifty years as a commercial traveller, and he told about this incident of 1869. He had a letter from a woman in Kansas, whom he remembered as a little girl, who wrote him that she was in the Soule store when the snuff incident occurred, and that the whole town of Fairfield enjoyed the joke.

10. Published in the *Swanton Courier*, July 13, 1939.



## IX. PETER AND CONRAD SAXE AS CUSTOMERS

MENTION has been made of Peter Saxe, the father of the poet. Peter and "Young Peter" appear fairly frequently in the pages. On one occasion Stearns sold Saxe two pounds of tea for \$1.92. This seems a very high price, but it illustrates how far Highgate was out of the trading centers. Saxe himself sold tea. He was one of the leading men of the town, and the fact that Stearns and Saxe had much to do with each other is a straw in favor of the hard-working Stearns who still lived in his log house.

The name of Jerry Goodheart who was the miller at Saxe's Mills appears only once in the book. That was a time when Stearns loaned 50 cents to Jerry. That was a trivial affair, no doubt about that, but it permits some speculation and rumination. Fifty cents was a day's work. Why did not Jerry ask Peter Saxe for the loan? Why did he prefer to go to Stearns for such a small accommodation? We shall never know. Men today usually prefer to get a temporary loan from most anybody but the boss, and also prefer that the boss should not know about the transaction. Furthermore, as we have seen, there rarely was much money at the mill, the toll being on a percentage based on the amount of grain that was ground. So Jerry wanted 50 cents. He got it. He paid it back.

It was of this employee of his father that John Godfrey Saxe wrote, when he penned his touching ballad, "Little Jerry the Miller." Those who have Saxe's poems at hand may care to read about this sterling and lovable character, who was friendly to all with whom he came in touch, and whose death inspired such recognition from the Vermont poet.

The poem starts this way:

*Beneath the hill you may see the mill  
Of wasting wood and crumbling stone;  
The wheel is dripping and clattering still,  
But Jerry, the miller, is dead and gone.*

He proceeds to pay a deserved tribute to this Frenchman who was beloved by everyone. His true surname was "Fortboncoeur," which is a stronger word than plain "Goodheart." In her recollections of Saxe's Mills, Mrs. Drury<sup>11</sup> says that the mill was built in 1820 by

11. *Swanton Courier*, July 13, 1939.



Jack Winters. This is the John Winters who in 1833 did the plastering for William Stearns' new house.

The name of Conrad Saxe, a brother of Peter Saxe, appears many times in the book. He had a forge and was one of the principal men in Highgate. He was well known to my father, Stephen B. Anderson, and was popularly known as "Old Coon Saxe." He was a solid substantial town character, being a Justice of the Peace, and Captain of the local militia. The Saxe family, speaking of the descendants of John Saxe the first of the name, was divided in its political views. The majority originally were adherents to the British crown, and today there probably are more Saxes in Canada than there are in the United States. Like many another prominent family, each went its way. Conrad Saxe was one of the thoroughly devoted Americans, and so was the poet, and his grandson, John Godfrey Saxe of New York City, today is one of the most prominent Democrats in that city. Generally speaking, of course, the other Saxes, whether located in America or in Canada, are all good citizens.

No item in the whole book personally pleased me more than that of 25 cents that in 1824 Stearns charged Conrad Saxe for "drawing kittles out of the sap bush." While the usual Vermont phrase is "sugar bush," meaning an orchard of sugar maple trees, to find more than a century ago in this account book this simple little phrase, such a friendly reminder of spring days when a lad must step lively to attend the fires under the boiling sap, and must keep long hours, was indeed a pleasure. I think Conrad Saxe got off too lightly with that 25 cent charge for teaming, yet it really represented a half day's pay at the prevailing price of labor. The charge passed unnoticed in that era, and no C.I.O. or W.P.A. was around to patrol the Stevens farm and picket him as unfair to labor.

The name of Clark Stearns appears frequently in the transaction. He was a younger brother of William, said to have been born in 1804. Clark had an older brother, Solomon Stearns, Junior, born about 1796 who married Polly (Mary) Woodruff. He was drowned in the St. Lawrence River, leaving his wife and three children. Clark Stearns then married the widow, and they had nine children of their own. He received the given name "Clark" because his mother's maiden name was Jemima Clark. William and Clark were very friendly and had various transactions. Another brother James, born around 1794, married Maria Deal (probably a daughter of the Loyalist Deal) and they had twelve children—all girls. (What conver-



sation that must have made!) A sister, Phoebe Stearns, born about 1792, probably in Chester, Vermont, married Alden Chase, and lived in Chase's Mills, St. Lawrence County, N. Y. Abner Stearns, who was either the oldest or next to the oldest of the Stearns children, moved from Highgate just previous to 1824 and finally died in Chase's Mills at the age of 95. He was born in Chester, Vermont, about 1788.

The father, Solomon Stearns, was living in Chester in 1791 when the first Vermont census was taken, but in 1800 when the second Vermont census was taken he was in Highgate. I think he must have had some legal troubles and had gotten into debt. Prior to 1836, in Vermont imprisonment for debt was one of the barbarous methods of harrying a person who could not satisfy his creditor. The law drove Ira Allen and others out of the state, and from the presence of payments to lawyers, as shown in a memorandum, there is a chance that Solomon Stearns went to live with his son Abner in Chase's Mills to avoid being "pinched" for debt. This is conjecture and may not be correct. He lived until 1842 and might have returned to Highgate after the repeal of the law but did not, probably because he was an old man and was comfortable where he was.

One of the oldtime customers was Henry Steinhour who is generally regarded as the first male child to be born in Highgate. His father, Peter Steinhour, was one of the Dutch or German settlers who arrived in Highgate in 1787. It is related of him that after going a long distance to get some potatoes to plant, and getting them covered into the ground, he was obliged to dig them up to escape starvation. Peter Steinhour had 16 children, 8 sons and 8 daughters. His son Henry at the time this account book opens was engaged in tanning, and he had considerable to do with Stearns. He bought from him hides and calfskins and large quantities of hemlock bark. At a much later period he was proprietor of a hotel in Highgate, a hostelry which in my youth was known as the "Old Maid Steinhour's hotel"—a place where I have attended dances when I was a young blade.

## X. SIDELIGHTS ON TRADING CUSTOMS

SO far as the book discloses, only one dispute of any consequence occurred in the ten years. That difference was in 1824 and was over the account of John Carman. It was necessary to call in ar-



bitrators. The exact situation can be explained only upon a conjectural basis. Apparently Carman had indorsed the note of Thomas Best, and Stearns expected Carman to be made responsible on settlement, and also objected to some credit items claimed by Carman. The difficulty apparently was adjusted by requiring Carman to pay Best's note while Carman got credit for items the details of which are not disclosed. The final account stood at \$43.57. Carman signed in the book with "Conrad Sax present," while Stearns wrote "Settled in full" with Conrad Weazel (what a name!) present. The parties continued to have trade relations so the affair left no scars. Only on one other occasion did Stearns require one of his customers to sign a receipt in the book. This practice of signing in books of account was quite general before 1800, and the abandoning of it, except in cases of disagreement, signified business progress. In various books of account, with which I am familiar, considerable formality was observed in these periodical settlements.<sup>12</sup> In Highgate this red tape, apparently, was cut out. It had required more than fifty years to accomplish this change. Query: Was this an early exemplification of the oft-repeated correct saying that the customer is always right?

The only items that suggest relaxation are those of "knapsacks," and the word, for a wonder, is spelled correctly. These items always appear in June, good evidence that June training was not far away. These were homemade knapsacks and the charge usually was fifty cents. Some of the Highgate housewives probably got some pin money for these articles. The book, however, shows very few entries that suggest pin money. Once William Stearns' wife sold two coverlets for \$1.50 each. There is hardly another entry of that sort.

Reverting to June training in Highgate, there is an anecdote to the effect that the young men from that town appeared before their superior officer, who was Colonel Levi Hungerford, barefoot and proposed to go to muster in that way. Hungerford said nothing except that he would like to march the boys around a bit to see how they handled themselves on the field. He then selected a pasture full of thistles and unmercifully sent the raw troops over the ground.

12. It formerly was the practice to have the parties sign in the book at each accounting. This was equivalent to a receipt and signified a final discharge of the obligation.



Whereupon there was a surrender and thereafter the boys reported for military instruction with their shoes on.<sup>13</sup>

In this early period sheep were numerous. In 1840, the town of Highgate had more than 8,000 sheep. In 1825, sheep, according to the entries, were worth \$1.50 each and wool was valued from 42 to 50 cents a pound. The wool, of course, was used in spinning clothing for both sexes. Foot wheels cost \$4, and the ordinary spinning wheel is entered at \$2. Tallow, used chiefly for candles, was a shilling a pound. Candles themselves cost two cents each, and apparently were in little demand. The people of Highgate in those early days went to bed almost as soon as it was dark, and got up with the rising of the sun.

The book is full of potato entries. The sandy soil of Highgate is admirably adapted to the raising of tubers, and in 1840 nearly 40,000 bushels were produced there. Today, Highgate could compete with the potatoes of Aroostook, and make plenty of money, if anybody with a little organizing ability and some financial backing would undertake the raising of potatoes. The town could surprise Maine, but will it?

It is apparent from an examination of the book that Stearns had some losses caused by failure to pay the account. Either the people suddenly disappeared from town, or died leaving a widow and small children, or just could not make both ends meet. Such items, here and there, are either crossed off the books, or left unsettled.

It was a common thing for an account to run two or three years without any payments. Then, perhaps because the memory of the customer had been jogged, the account suddenly would be paid in full. It was not the Highgate code to charge interest. In the whole period there is only one instance where interest is charged and that was on a long-standing note. It was an easy-going community, so far as obligations are concerned. This is rather astonishing in view of the fact that a debtor could be jailed if he did not pay. Annoying a man who owed you—it just was not done in Highgate. One of the reasons for that was that there was only one lawyer in town, Robert L. Paddock. Later, when lawyers became numerous litigation picked up. Why not?

After studying some of the entries, I believe that Stearns had a shrewd Yankee way of compelling borrowers to return the article.

13. See "June Training in Vermont," by L. L. Dutcher, *Hemenway's Gazetteer*, Volume II, pp. 347-355.



I believe it was his practice to say to applicants for the loan of some article: "I'll have to charge you for the use of this at the rate of 25 cents a day, but if you return it in a day or so, I won't charge you anything." The manner in which these entries are made indicates just such an arrangement: Use of sled (sleigh) 25 cents and then marked off; use of wagon wheels (imagine that) to go to St. Johns, 75 cents; use of a cross-cut saw three days 75 cents, and then marked off; and so on, pistols, augers, anything that a neighbor needed badly just for a short time. And may I record here that Ezekiel Loucks in 1831 borrowed five augers and a pistol, for which the charge was \$1. Ezekiel brought back the augers, but he apparently never returned the pistol or paid the \$1. Perhaps he lost the pistol at muster.

There are a few entries about planting. Stearns planted his own corn in 1824 on May 25 and two days later plowed a neighbor's cornfield. His potatoes were planted June 1. These dates are about right according to present custom. On the other hand, he plowed David Hunt's garden for him as early as April 17. He usually did his haying in the middle of July but stacked his hay as late as August 17. He sold what must have been a second crop of clover hay in October. When he sold seed potatoes, the price was 50 cents a bushel, but seed peas were worth \$1 a bushel. There are no comments on the weather in the book, which was a bit disappointing, but there was no real reason why Stearns should have appended any of his ideas about the season in a book devoted to business.

#### XI. FRAME HOUSE AND A SON-IN-LAW

AFTER living in a log house for more than forty years William Stearns decided, probably in the winter of 1832, that in the spring he would capitalize his limited success and have built for himself and family a frame building. This decision proved in every way momentous. Stearns, although handy with tools, was not equal to the task of constructing a modern habitation, and accordingly he engaged my grandfather, John Anderson, who as a lad ten years old had come to Highgate from Scotland in 1818, to build the new home. One of the developments from this contract was the speedy engagement of John Anderson to the only grown daughter in the Stearns family, Anna Maria. It was one of those cases of love at first sight on both sides. She was eighteen and he was twenty-five.

His father, William Anderson, had been a linen manufacturer in



Dundee, Scotland, and had seen his business ruined by the Napoleonic wars, and by economic changes in the weaving craft. In despair over the prospects of ever making any kind of a recovery, he sold the little of his business that remained and leaving his wife and several children but taking the son John he sailed for America. He had salvaged from the wreck of his home and affairs a valuable grandfather clock, which he brought with him. Arriving in Quebec, very nearly broke, he most regretfully sold the timepiece for \$50 and soon made his way to Highgate, swearing by all that was holy that he never again would be found in any part of the world where the English had a foothold. In time he got ahead, bought five acres of land from Heman Allen, nephew of Ira, and made a home so that his wife and children might join him. Not being used to pioneer hardships, he literally wore himself out with toil, and died in 1841. He had some literary gifts and wrote verses.

Work upon the Stearns frame house began in April, 1833, and was not finished until November when the plastering was done. This latter job cost only \$2.75—how astonishingly inexpensive that seems—the work being done by John Winters. My grandfather had agreed to build the house from materials furnished by Stearns for a contract price of \$128.50. There was a general plan and a stipulation that there should be "eight windows." As the work progressed, partial payments were made, sometimes in cash if the sum was small, but usually by following the prevailing trade procedure. Thus Stearns turned in a two-year-old colt as part payment, the value being considered \$50. A sizable credit item was an order on the store of S. W. & S. S. Keyes for \$75.75. Two notes, aggregating nine dollars, made by William Teachout, were accepted as cash, although Stearns records in his book that the sum represents the cost of 18 pounds of wool that Teachout had from him. Small credit items that went to pay for the work were these: a half pound of tea, 32 cents; a pound of spice, 20 cents; a bushel and a half of rye, for \$1.20; and two pounds of wool for \$1.00.

Evidently the Stearns family changed its mind about the number of windows and cut the total from eight to six. This, viewed at this distance, seems like a mistake, but who can say? When all the conversation about this item was concluded, Stearns wrote in the book: "Reduction for two winders that want made, \$3." That settled the vexatious problem. Probably the cold north winds were the deciding factor. I doubt if the small economy that was accomplished had any-



thing to do with the final decision, but it may have been the motive. After all, \$3 is \$3, whether in 1833 (when it was perhaps nearer our \$10) or now when (sometimes) it will pay your poll tax.

My grandfather, John Anderson, had been bound out as an apprentice in 1824 to William Cookman of St. Albans. The contract was signed March 12 in that year—to go into effect presently. He signed up to become a carpenter and joiner. Because those early indentures are somewhat rare and as it probably is a good example of the style of document issued at that time in Vermont, I deem it worth printing. This contract, given herewith, was for a five-year period. It was most faithfully observed both by Cookman and my grandfather. This instrument does not disclose whether the contract was signed in Highgate or in St. Albans. As the indenture prevented my grandfather from marrying during the five-year term, it is no surprise that not long after he had got started “on his own,” he followed the beckoning finger of Cupid which led him to the Stearns home.

The indenture,<sup>14</sup> with an exact duplication for the spelling, is here reproduced:

*This Indentur witnessith that I William Anderson of Highgate in the County of franklin State of Vermont hath put and placed and by this presant doth put and bind out his Son John Anderson as an apprintis to William Cookman of St Albans State and County aforesade to learn the arts of Carpinter and joiner the Sade John Anderson after the manner of an apprentis to Dwell with and serv the Sade William Cookman from the first of May next untill the first of May one thousand eight hundred and twenty nine At wich time the Sade apprintis if he should be living he will be at Liberty he shall comit no Matremoney Contract during the Sade time tavins or Houses of gaming he Shall not frequent but atent to the Buisness of his Marster and the Sade William Cookman on his part Doth hearby promis on his partickler Contract and agre to titch the Sade apprintis or Cose him to be taught in the Buisness aforesade and allso to Send the Sade apprintis to Scool which is taught by an able instructor At Least Sevin Months and a half and Shall well and faithfulley find and provide for the Sade Apprintis good and Sufficent foode and good lodgins and all the other nesseserers Sutable for Sutch an Apprintice in Sicknes and in helth providing a physition if NEEDED and do All for him which a legal In-*

14. The original indenture is owned by the writer.



*dentur in the State of Vermont washing and mending including and the Sade appentis Shall have wagis yearly to find Clothes for the first year forty Dollers and rise ten Dollers Eich year the pay Shall be Cattle or Grane and Store Pay and the Sade William Cookman agrees to pay up All areriregis by the first of May in Eitch year of his Aprinti-ship in Testemoney whareof the Sade parties have hear unto interchangably Set thear hands and Seel this Twelfth Day of March one Thousand Eight hundred and Twenty four Signed Sealed and De-livered*

*In presents of  
James Dodge Jr.  
Rufus Bixby*

*William Anderson (seal)  
John Anderson (seal)  
William Cookman (seal)*

From start to finish there is no punctuation whatever. The place at which the contract is signed is not indicated, but I am inclined to think that it was written in St. Albans and composed by a Justice of the Peace who had a smattering of the law.

This contract was carried out and my grandfather became a very capable carpenter and builder. I have heard him say that he always tried to have at least one left-handed man on jobs with him, because a "leftie" was able to nail in spots that could not conveniently be reached by a right-handed man. A left-handed man, he said, was especially useful when stairs were being built.

The indenture is another bit of evidence of the lack of cash, in Franklin County, seen in the provision that John Anderson is to be paid in "cattle or Grane and Store Pay," the last item meaning that Cookman might give him an order on a store for the amount due. Until we read such items, we never realize how much convenience a check (one that does not "bounce") gives to the present generation.

With the house completed comfort seemed assured, but Fate is inexorable and we have to record that William Stearns died either early in 1835 or in the last part of 1834—probably the latter. On February 3, 1835, in the Franklin County Probate Court at St. Albans, petition was filed for the appointment of an administrator. Strangely enough, this was not followed by any action either by the heirs or by the court, and it was not until May 10, 1869, that the estate was actually divided. The cause of this long delay is entirely a mystery. I suppose the widow and the children, three of whom were grown up, and the other three small, continued to live on the farm and as long as the taxes were paid, no pressure for a distribution was felt. Like



many another country estate, it was just allowed to lie neglected for thirty-five years so far as the interests of the heirs were concerned.

In the distribution in 1869,<sup>15</sup> it would appear that the widow Sarah Stearns and her son, Eldad B. Stearns, were the administrators. The six children, Eldad B. Stearns, William P. Stearns, Albert Stearns, Anna Maria Anderson, Harriet Church, and Lucy Stickney were each given one sixth of a tract of about twenty-seven acres, a part of the farm, valued as a whole at \$1,080. Thus each got land worth about \$180. The widow probably got her dower third of the estate, which would seem to be the farmhouse and about thirteen acres of land, but the decree is loosely drawn, and it is hard to discover what she did get. What that farm might have been worth in 1834 when he died is problematical. I should say the farm in 1834 was worth considerably less than in 1869. So when William Stearns died, he had accumulated only a modest estate to show for his unremitting labor lasting, say, from 1815 to 1834. Highgate was no town in which a working farmer could acquire any sudden wealth. Stearns could make with his own hands any number of chairs and sell them at 75 cents apiece, but apparently his thrift enabled him only to break a little better than even. It must have been some satisfaction to the hard-working pioneer to have built that frame house, which he was able to occupy about a year before death claimed him. One of the stories I have heard of his passing is that he died of "lung fever." That is the old-fashioned description of pneumonia.

Sometimes it is said of a man who is removed from life just when everything begins to show a favorable aspect, that "when he thinks his greatness is aspiring, he falls like autumn leaves to enrich mother earth." That applies to the case of William Stearns.

15. I am indebted to my sister-in-law, Harriet Safford Dutcher of St. Albans, for an examination of the probate records on the Stearns' estate, and to valuable information about Highgate and the Saxes.

