

MARBLE-HOLMAN-BRYANT HOUSE

*274 North Main Street
Petersham, Massachusetts*



Harvard Forest
324 North Main Street
Petersham, Massachusetts

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Pre-House History

In 1733, the land on which this house stands was part of Lot 28 in the newly formed Proprietorship known as Nichewaug. The original lot was a parcel of 70 acres “with a highway of five rods wide crossing it not far from the middle.” John Varnum of Dracut drew Lot 28, but like many Proprietors, he never settled in Nichewaug. Instead, he sold the lot in 1735 to Samuel Willard, of Lancaster, for £50. Willard then sold it just one year later to Jonathan Wilder, of Marlborough, for £100, double the amount he had paid. In 1744, Wilder sold the land to Jonathan Marble, of Nichewaug, this time for £92. All of these deeds appear to be for land only; none of them mention any buildings standing on the property at the time of sale.

A House and Its Families in Brief

The original house appears to have been built between 1744 and 1759 by then owner, Jonathan Marble, a farmer, who was born in Marlborough. In 1759, when Jonathan Marble sold the property to John Sawyer, the deed conveyed 46 acres with a “dwelling house and all the other buildings thereon,” and included an additional 13 acres of land. Jonathan Marble had sold the 23 acres of Lot 28 that was located on the western side of the road (today’s North Main Street) to his brother, Samuel Marble, for £105 in 1749.

In the four years that John Sawyer owned the property, an additional 55 acres of land abutting Lot 28 was added. By 1762,

Sawyer had mortgaged the entire 114 acres to John Chandler, a wealthy gentleman who invested in real estate and eventually built the large home known as the Deer Farm [at 118 North Main Street]. John Chandler quickly sold this property a year later to Solomon Holman III of Sutton, for £220.

The Holman family retained ownership of the farm for the next hundred years, as it passed from Solomon, who died in 1804, to his sons Moses, John, Solomon, and Oliver, and then to his grandsons, Solomon O. and John M. Holman.

During the years the Holman family owned the property, the land was continuously farmed and the small house of approximately 1,000 square feet was the birthplace of many children. The size of the house remained the same until the ell addition was added, sometime after 1814. After 1857, the farm, then comprised of 78 acres, was sold several times over the next forty years.

Walter Bryant bought the property in 1899 and it again remained in one family for more than a hundred years. In 2008, the executor of the will of Richard Bryant, grandson of Walter, sold the farm to Harvard University. Harvard Forest undertook renovation of the house, barn, and outbuildings; opened the pastures for livestock; and is maintaining the property’s surrounding fields and forest. The former Pierce Road, a town-owned footpath since the 1970s, runs through the property offering a fine public hiking trail.



Walter Bryant

– CHRISTINE MANDEL

Petersham Historical Society, September 2012

The Farmhouse through the years, left to right:
circa 1890s, circa 1930s, and 2012

