**2023 Monument Talk**

I’d like to tell you about how our little village in the town of Landgrove was founded. I draw the distinction between the town, consisting of almost 5600 acres, and the village, this group of a dozen houses.

If you were here last year, you heard about how our town was first settled by William Utley, an enterprising farmer from Connecticut. He and his oldest son, Asa, cut a road from the West River between what is now Londonderry and Weston in 1768 over the hill into what is now Landgrove. In 1769 William Utley brought his wife and six children to settle on the edge of Landgrove Flats, about where the Martin house is now.

The family began clearing the land and commenced to farm. They built a log cabin to live in, as there were no saw mills to provide lumber. They grew wheat, corn and potatoes, but had no place to grind their wheat to make flour or corn to make cornmeal. So, Mr. Utley, along with the other early settlers, all of whom were farmers, transported their wheat and corn to the Connecticut River and then floated it down to grist mills in either Massachusetts or Connecticut. That’s a long way to go.

In 1800 a man by the name of Ephraim Hildreth built a dam along what we know as Utley Brook just below the bridge, where the river changes from a meandering stream through Landgrove Flats to a tumbling river, perfect for generating power. And in 1801 Mr. Hildreth built a mill, both for grinding grain and corn, and for sawing logs into lumber. Now the farmers could have their grain and corn ground right here.

When the town had been laid out in 1780, the founders set aside 46 acres in the center of town for a town common. In 1808, in appreciation to Ephraim Hildreth for building the mills, the town fathers deeded the 46-acre town common to him. Not long after, running of the mills was turned over to a man by the name of Robert Chase along with 20 of the original 46 acres that had been set aside as the town common. These 20 acres are what the village of Landgrove was eventually built on. You’re standing in the middle of them.

The first house in the village was most likely a log cabin, built by Mr. Hildreth and later occupied by Mr. Chase. It was said to be “near the mills” and that is all we know about its location. In 1818 Mr. Chase sold the mills and the 20-acre mill property to Daniel Tuthill, town clerk and selectman of the town, who, in 1821, hired Robert Clark to run the mills. (Remember that name – Robert Clark.) He had moved to Landgrove in 1814 and likely began his association with the mills that year. We know that he wasn’t a farmer because the grand lists during that time showed he had 1 cow and 1 horse. By the early 1820’s he had 2 cows and half a horse, which means he was sharing his horse with a family member.

The mills transferred ownership several times over the next few years, but Robert Clark appears to have been involved the entire time. By 1828 the mills had fallen into disrepair and a new owner, Aaron Buss, set about rebuilding them and a new higher dam was constructed, all with the help of Robert Clark. This new dam flooded the area we know as Landgrove Flats or Utley Flats, and for nearly the next hundred years there was a pond covering the area.

In 1834, Robert Clark, who we believe had been associated with the mills for 20 years, finally was able to purchase them, and they became known as Clarks Mills. Two of his sons, Gilmore and George, along with his son-in-law Nathaniel French, were also involved with running and ownership of the mills, so it was a family operation. I’m standing on the stones used in the grist mill.

In 1838 the first real houses began to be built on the 20-acre parcel that went with the mills’ owner, Robert Clark. Before this there had just been the log cabin that housed the mill operator. Robert Clark built a house for himself where the Harris’ now live. He sold the adjoining property to his son, Luther. This is where the Frohling’s house is now. And further south, on the other side of the current Waite’s house, another son, George Clark, built a house. These houses were probably crudely built, and we don’t think any part of them survived.

Because the Clark family owned the land on which the village was built, it was called Clarksville, and continued to be known as Clarksville for the next ninety years or so.

In 1841 the Clarks left the area, moving north to run the mills in Bethel, VT. Robert’s house either burned or was torn down and in 1842 a “new house” was built – this is Tom and Suzy Harris’ house. Over the next 15 years, most of the houses in the village were constructed. We know this from an 1856 map of Bennington County. That map shows five houses on the west side of the road and one blacksmith’s shop right at the corner with Nichols Road. On the east side of the road were the mills, a store and one house owned by the storekeeper. That house stood where Steve Fanelli’s garage is now located. We don’t know the exact dates when most of the houses were built, but the house behind me, now owned by Bobby and Sally Waite, we believe was built in 1854. And the house behind you, now owned by the Frohling family, was built around 1850, after the previous house burned.

The mills burned in 1846 or 1847, but were rebuilt by 1850. Some of the houses were probably built for mill workers, as the mills needed manpower. Besides the gristmill and the lumber mill, the mills made the parts with which to assemble chairs. They made clapboards by taking a round log and cutting wedges out of it, leaving a center post. These were used as fenceposts. Monk Ogden remembers these, and we are very grateful that he saved one.

From the Beers Map of 1869 we know that in the intervening thirteen years the River House had been built, a post office had been established in the house behind you, and the former blacksmith’s shop on the corner had been converted into a store. A new blacksmith had come into town, building the house where Ron and Lisa Jager live and his blacksmiths shop was adjacent to this house. The row of houses behind me included a carriage shop about where the Fairbanks’ house is now.

So that was our healthy little Village of Landgrove, about 150 years ago. Nine houses, a vibrant mill for grain, lumber, and other wood products, a store, a carriage shop, a blacksmith’s shop and a post office.

I will leave you with that vision.