

Job Bates' House

By: Doris Sherrow

My house — the thing that drew me to Portland — was probably built in 1747 by a young Wareham, Massachusetts, blacksmith named **Job Bates**. He built a Cape Cod style house on a corner of the Wangunk Indian reservation.

While still in Wareham, 26-year-old Bates had married 21-year-old **Faith Doty** on July 25, 1747. On October 15, they were remarried in "Middletown"--the records for Portland were filed in Middletown before 1767. Apparently they had moved from Wareham to Portland and felt the need to show the local community that they were married.

It is unclear why the young Bateses moved to Portland. Job's mother was the former **Margaret Churchill**, a distant cousin to **John Churchill** who came to Portland in the 1720s. Perhaps that was the connection. Also, Bates was a blacksmith. Possibly he came to work for the shipyards which were growing along the Connecticut River in the 1740s. Around the same time, Faith's father moved to Sharon, Connecticut.

In early August of 1749, the Bateses had a baby girl whom they named **Hannah**. That had been Faith's mother's name, as well as the name of one of her sisters. Sadly, little Hannah died eight weeks later, on October 1st, and they buried her in the Old Burying Ground, which once stood on Commerce Street.

On December 5, 1750, Job and Faith had another girl whom they named **Betty**. Betty may have been named for Faith's sister Elizabeth. However, there may be another source for the new baby's name: the Bateses had built their little house on the Wangunk reservation. Legally speaking, they were squatters. But it is difficult to imagine young Bates planting his family in hostile territory. Almost certainly, he had a good relationship with the Wangunk. One of the much-respected members of the tribe was a woman called **Betty**; it is possible that the Bateses had named their second daughter after this matriarch of the tribe.

In March of 1754, when little Betty was three and Faith was pregnant with another child, the Congregational Church scolded Job for "absenting himself from the Committee of the Church." Possibly he had stayed home to help Faith--the Church was then located on the northeast corner of Bartlet and Prospect streets. On March 24, Job "confessed and was restored." The next month Betty was baptized, and in May, so was week-old David. In November of that year, Job helped gather the minister's rate — 600 pounds, without firewood.

Ebenezer White, whose 1755-to-1807 diary forms a cornerstone of Portland history, had moved into his new house at 582 Main Street on September 30, 1755. On October 18, he complained to his diary that "Job Batts" had overcharged him for digging a cellar. White successfully retrieved his money.

(When we opened up the old well on the east side of the house some years ago, I shuddered to think of Bates, or, given the narrow diameter of the well, one of his boys, descending into that hole, perhaps 12 feet deep, digging, then laying the stones which have kept it open for over two centuries. But his recorded digging and stone-laying skills mean that that's how it must have happened.)

For the next forty years, White made occasional references to Bates--White and his sons often took apples to Job's "cyder mill." White charged Bates for foodstuffs or the occasional loan of a horse, and paid him for blacksmithing wares, including "two large knives and one penknife" in February of 1781.

In July of 1756, the Bates's second son, Samuel, was born. That November, his father was active on the school committee of the Church. (There were no secular schools.)

In early August of 1757, Job left his young family to serve in the French and Indian War. Inducted into **Lt. Abijah Hall's** company as a sergeant, he and forty-some other Portland and East Hampton men left for "Service at the Time of Alarm for the Releaf of Fort Wm Henry and parts Adjacent Aug't 1757," according to the record in the State Library. Bates was discharged August 26th and returned to Portland.

On September 19, 1758, Bates wrote a petition to the General Assembly, asking that they grant permission for the English to buy the Wangunk reservation. Along with the standard advantages for acquiring the land that other petitioners had listed --shipbuilding, proximity to the

meeting house, cattle grazing--Bates stated "through mistake I have set my house on the same."
The Assembly did not grant permission.

Job and Faith had another son, Abner, in 1759, and a daughter, Lydia, perhaps as late as 1763.

On December 28, 1761, Ebenezer White wrote in his diary, "Mr. Batts D[ebto]r to Instructing **T[homa]s Stevenson and Jer[emia]h Penfield in Arithmetick**" I don't quite know what this means. It sounds as if Bates either employed Stevenson and Penfield, or was their guardian, and for some reason, he wanted them to learn "Arithmetick." Bates did serve as guardian for a young Bowers boy, who was probably the child or grandchild of my five-greats grandfather, John Bowers, who lived in Portland and died in the French and Indian War in 1760. Perhaps Bates was guardian to these two as well.

Finally in 1765, the General Assembly granted the local settlers permission to buy the Wangunk reservation. The land was signed over in early October, and within the month, Portland residents began buying it up in parcels of two to five acres. On October 31st, Bates bought two pieces, the three acres where his house stood on the corner of Indian Hill Avenue and Main Street, and three acres roughly opposite the present-day Petzold's Marina. Job, Faith, and their children, **Betty**, 14, **David**, 11, **Samuel**, 9, **Abner**, 6, and **Lydia**, 2, were now legitimate residents of the little house at 3 Indian Hill Avenue.

On September 21, 1775, David married **Ruth Cheney**, who had grown up diagonally opposite him in the colonial house at 635 Main Street. In June of 1776, they had a son whom they named Charles. This was Job and Faith's first grandchild. David and Ruth probably lived with either his family or hers.

In the summer of 1776, Samuel Bates, barely twenty years old, joined the thousands of young men who were going off to fight the British. Sometime between August and November, Samuel was captured and incarcerated in one of the miserable converted New York City warehouses and churches that the British had taken to jail the captured troops.

As the prisoners began to sicken with smallpox toward winter, it occurred to the British that they could send the dying men home, thereby not only avoiding the rotting bodies but wreaking further havoc on the American countryside. So they shipped the soldiers back to Connecticut. (Diana Ross McCain wrote a wonderful article on this subject in the December 30, 1998 Hartford Courant.)

On December 24, Samuel Bates was put on board the Glasgow, which sailed to Connecticut and put him ashore at Milford on January 1, 1777. Within the week he was back home in Portland. The Bateses must have been overjoyed when he appeared in the yard! But the smallpox had him. His gravestone reads: "Samuel Bates who died 3 weeks after his Return from Grievous Capture."

Life was not totally lost for the Bates family though. In December of 1778, David and Ruth had a daughter, Hannah. The next summer, Job deeded a small portion of his homelot to David, and David began to build the house which is now known as 5 Indian Hill Avenue. Ebenezer White made note of carting foundation stones for David Bates on November 16, 1779.

So Job and Faith had two cute little grandchildren by 1780, but two of their own dead as well. On June 5, 1780, Abner married **Lucy Hale**. Abner and Lucy also seem to have lived with Job and Faith. Abner named his first son, born the following year, **Samuel**, in honor of his older brother, but the baby died two days after his birth. (It was July of 1976 when I first located the Bates graves in Center Cemetery. Imagine my dismay when I saw that two young Samuels had already died in my house — my year-and-a-half-old son was named Samuel!)

Later in the Revolution, David Bates was active in privateering. In September of 1781, his ship the Regulator, took the British vessel Restoration. Surely his actions were fanned by the memory of his dead younger brother.

I don't know what became of Betty or Lydia--Job Bates was not a good one for filing vital records information. David and Ruth had five children between 1775 and 1784, all of whom grew to maturity. Abner and Lucy had at least five, though two of theirs also died in childhood.

On August 4, 1795, Ebenezer White wrote in his diary, "Old Mr. Bates is sick." (Bates was only six years older than him!) Ten days later, he wrote, "This day Job Bates died." And two days later he wrote "Mr. Job Bates buried ~ Mr. Huntington prayed."