

Letter to the Editor

August 24, 2007

The Dudleys and the Tafts are two of the most respected families in the history of the town of Mendon. Both families earned their living through agriculture. Both families served the town in many capacities in public office. Both families lived in the beautiful Greek-revival farmhouse at one North Avenue. The house reflected what their families represented: hard work and a dedication to Mendon's agrarian society.

Silas Dudley was a highly successful farmer and public servant. His farm extended down the eastern slope of Mendon's hilltop village. Historian Ellery Crane described his property by saying, "It was a real pleasure to view his tidy, well-kept buildings and broad acres as you passed his premises". He served as a highway surveyor and as a member of the school committee. He donated the land for the town hall, and he served as the chairman of the 1867 committee for the two hundredth birthday of the town. Reverend Adin Ballou eulogized him by saying he was a man whose "integrity and honesty of purpose were the ends and aims of his existence." Mr. Dudley died on November 15, 1882. His son Edward continued to run the farm until 1901.

The Tafts purchased the farm and operated it through the 1980's. They were descendants of Robert and Sarah Taft, early settlers who moved to Mendon in 1679 after the King Philip War. The Taft ancestry is one of prominence, not just in Mendon, but also at a national level. It includes President William Howard Taft and Senator Robert Taft of Ohio. The family record of public service and philanthropy was exemplary. The farmhouse, with its meadows, pastures, and apple orchards, was a symbol of what the family stood for.

Sites of previous Mendon history surrounded the house, built in 1835. Across the street is Founders' Park, where the first settlers built their meetinghouse in 1668. Eight years later, this structure was burned to the ground during the King Philip War. Founders' Park was also the site of where one hundred sixty-four brave Minutemen from Mendon mustered and marched off to respond to the alarm of Lexington and Concord in April 1775. The Dudley-Taft house also overlooked Ammidon Tavern, where thirty people from Charlestown were housed after the Battle of Bunker Hill. This same tavern welcomed Nathan Hale and his troops during the Revolutionary War, and the newly elected President George Washington stopped here in 1789 on his post inaugural tour to visit his old army friend, Philip Ammidon.

In the 1820's through 1830's, most of today's existing houses and buildings were constructed in the village. It was a time when many prosperous and professionally elite people moved to town.

Mendon's economy, society, and way of life have changed. The farmhouse that once paid tribute to the Dudleys and Tafts has been taken down. Surely, a new building will be constructed to replace it. Hopefully, the new structure will in some ways reflect the history, the architecture, and the great families who lived at one North Avenue many years ago.

Richard Grady
20 North Avenue
Mendon, MA