

Shirley Clute, "Bidwell's Saltbox House" *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* Volume 21, No. 2 (Summer 1993).

Published by: Institute for Massachusetts Studies and Westfield State University

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BIDWELL'S SALTBOX HOUSE

By Shirley S. Clute

In an isolated area in the south Berkshire Hills of western Massachusetts, a saltbox house, which was built around 1750 for Adonijah Bidwell, provides an ideal prospect to consider one hundred years of cultural changes that affected an individual family. From 1750 to 1850, three generations of Bidwells owned and occupied the house, which is situated on a hilltop in the town of Monterey. Within the contexts of necessity and symbolism, Bidwell's house was a part of the continuation of John Winthrop's 1630 religious construction of "a city upon a hill," and it remains a model artifact of the legitimacy of Puritan tradition.



Situated on a hilltop, the Bidwell House was sited to the south, overlooking the meetinghouse and the town. Photo by Shirley S. Clute.

Adonijah Bidwell was part of the Puritan mission, as well as its ideals, bounties, and symbolism. Forebears of Adonijah Bidwell arrived in the Massachusetts Bay area early in the seventeenth century, and soon were a part of the early migration to Hartford, Connecticut. Bidwell was born on October 18, 1716, and he was raised in the city of Hartford, in the Connecticut River Valley. His father was a store owner who also owned ships that sailed between Hartford and the West Indies, as part of the larger triangle trade between England, Africa, and the West Indies. In the same year that Bidwell was born, his father was lost at sea,

on a rum and sugar trip to Barbados.¹ Adonijah was the youngest of four surviving children. In keeping with the Puritan tradition of biblical associations, Adonijah was a name from the Old Testament, and translated from Hebrew to mean Jah is my Lord.²

Three biblical personalities were named Adonijah. Only one, however, specifically related to Adonijah Bidwell at his birth. The story of the first Adonijah, the "fourth son of David," can be found in the second book of Samuel, and continued through the first book of Kings, with over twenty direct references. Two later biblical personalities were also named Adonijah: the second was mentioned in the second book of Chronicles, as a teacher of "the Law of the Lord," and the third reference occurred in chapter ten of the Book of Nehemiah, as "chief of the people."³ Appropriate to his position in the family and perhaps by virtue of time and place, Adonijah Bidwell was to fulfill the multiple prophetic destinies for which he was named.

Bidwell began to assimilate the providential prospect of his name, as he grew up and attended the Yale Divinity School. Of twenty-two students in his class at Yale, Adonijah Bidwell was ranked twenty-first.⁴ Class ranking did not necessarily indicate academic achievement, but rather the social and economic status of his father. Sons of fathers who were in the recognized professions of law, medicine, or divinity were usually ranked at the top of the class, while students whose fathers were merchants, farmers, or other tradesmen, automatically received a lower class rank. Such ranking was generally maintained throughout the student's college career, regardless of any change in the student's academic performance or his father's social or economic position.⁵

 1. Joan S. Bidwell, *Bidwell Family History* (Baltimore, 1984), pp. 15 and 25; *American Ancestry* (Albany, 1894), IX: 10; and Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York, 1885-1913), X: 639.

2. Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (22nd ed., New York, 1955), p. 14.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

4. Collegio Yalensi, *Catalogus Academiae Yalensis* (Connecticut, 1784), p. 15; and Dexter, *Biographical Sketches*, p. 638.

5. Franklin Bowditch Dexter, "On Some Social Distinctions at Harvard and Yale before the Revolution," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society*, new series IX (October, 1893): 58-59.

No English model for class ranking existed, and the practice of listing students by rank was abandoned by Yale in 1767. The practice may have originated at Harvard at some time during the seventeenth century, and it ended there in 1771.⁶

By becoming a clergyman, Bidwell joined the powerful ranks of the Puritan church-state of New England. Through training in divinity, the classics, and the liberal arts, Bidwell created a professional foundation on which he could build his life. It also contributed to the seventeenth and eighteenth century English philosophical ideal of cultivating a gentlemanly status. Closely linked with traditional professional status and social standing was the notion of "gentleman," which served to support ministerial influence in the community, which then obligated the clergy to participate in the leadership of the society and the government. Cultural and ideological values were maintained within the Puritan framework, due to the economic custom that in order to sustain himself and his family, a minister ideally devoted more time to his calling than to agriculture.

In keeping with his education and the destiny of his biblical name, after graduating from Yale in 1740, Adonijah Bidwell went into the community, "taking with [him] the Book of the Law of the Lord; [he] went around to all the towns . . . and taught the people."⁷ Bidwell taught school in Connecticut for several years, before he was ordained in 1744. During the French and Indian Wars, Bidwell was commissioned as military chaplain for the Connecticut fleet which was involved in the 1745 Louisbourg (Nova Scotia) expedition.⁸ After the war, Reverend Bidwell returned to Connecticut to continue his ministry in Simsbury. He then served as an interim pastor for the Dutch Reformed Church in Kinderhook, New York, for twenty-nine weeks during 1749.⁹

Meanwhile, colonial territorial expansion was a primary concern for England, particularly disputes with the French and the

6. Ibid., pp. 54, 57-58.

7. 2 Chronicles, 17:8.

8. Rev. Adonijah Bidwell, "Journal of Rev. Adonijah Bidwell, Chaplain of the Fleet, Expedition to Cape Breton," trans. by E. M. Bidwell, New England Historical and Genealogical Register, XXVII (Boston, 1873): 153-160.

9. Dexter, Yale Annals, pp. 639-640.

Indians. Even though by 1734 the Puritan "errand in the wilderness" was being addressed by Colonel Ashley in Sheffield and John Sargeant at the Stockbridge mission, boundary disputes between Massachusetts and New York made the settlement of the area a matter of primary consideration. So the settlement of the western frontier settlement and its possession by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and England was unquestionable, land was granted for settlement along the "Great Road" between Westfield and Sheffield, in an effort to connect the open lands between the Connecticut and Housatonic rivers. The result was isolated land ownership, rather than an accommodation of expanding commerce which made the western Massachusetts townships practical.

By 1738, Hampshire County's Township Number One, at Housatonic, was located about seven miles east of the northern section of Sheffield, and to the north of the "Great Road" -- the lifeline between civilization and the frontier, and it was surveyed into lots.¹⁰ Township Number One's primary town road followed the hill-top ridges that angled northwest off the Westfield-Sheffield Great Road, at the Township's eastern boundary, and continued northwest toward Stockbridge, essentially dividing Township Number One in half.¹¹ The meetinghouse was built in the heart of the Township, along the Town Road. Its construction took several years to complete, during the 1740s, because of concern over conflicts with the Mahican Indians. Accessible to all people, the more densely-populated section of the Township centered around and south of the meetinghouse.¹² Thus, Township Number One acknowledged John Winthrop and the early settlers of Massachusetts Bay, by building the meetinghouse in the center of a "city upon a hill."

During the Town Meeting of Township Number One in November of 1737, held at Watertown, near Boston, the proprietors voted to "set apart" Lot No. 25 for the first settled

10. Township Number One, Town Meeting, September 19, 1738, in "Colonial Records," (ms. in Great Barrington Registrar of Deeds), II: 818.

11. "A Plan of Tyringham," ms. in the Bidwell House, Monterey, Mass.

12. Samuel W. Bush, A History of the County of Berkshire, Massachusetts (Pittsfield, 1829), pp. 96, 279, and 283.

minister.¹³ During their meeting on January 12, 1749, the Proprietors of Township Number One voted to provide four lots to each "Right." The original Lot No. 25, which contained about 45 acres and which was set aside for the first settled minister, became four separate lots, which totaled 280 acres.¹⁴ Almost twelve years elapsed between the date of the completed land survey and the time that Township Number One found a minister to establish a church for the growing hilltop community.

When he was thirty-four years old and unmarried, Reverend Adonijah Bidwell continued to fulfill his prophetic odyssey, as described in chapter ten of the Book of Nehemiah, as "chief of the people." Reverend Bidwell accepted the pastorate of Township Number One on September 20, 1750, at a pay rate of four shillings a week.¹⁵ With eight people gathered together in Township Number One on September 25, 1750, the Congregational Church was formed.¹⁶ Bidwell's installation as the official settled minister of the area's nascent church took place on October 3, 1750.¹⁷ During his thirty-four years of ministry in the church, the Reverend Bidwell experienced change in both his private life and in the life of Township Number One. Change on the local level was often affected by an expanding world view, enhanced by a growing population, as well as by expanding transportation and communication networks.

Maintaining a link with Connecticut was a means for Reverend Bidwell to keep up with the current events of his time. By horseback, a trip to urban Hartford was a days' ride from Township Number One.¹⁸ Because of family, friends, and

13. Town Meeting of Township Number One, November, 1737, in "Colonial Records," pp. 817-818.

14. Ibid., October 9, 1749, in "Colonial Records," II: 820.

15. Rev. Adonijah Bidwell, Letter to the Inhabitants of the Town of Tyringham, March 28, 1778, in "Tyringham Town Records," XIII (1767-1781) (typescript, Tyringham Historical Commission, n.d.), p. 9.

16. Township Number One Covenant agreed to by the Church of Christ in No. 1, September 25, 1750, quoted in Eloise Meyers, A Hinterland Settlement (Tyringham, 1963), p. 9.

17. Installation Document, October 3, 1750, in Ward Collection, Monterey, Mass.

18. Wyllis E., Wright, Colonel Ephraim Williams: A Documentary Life (Pittsfield, 1970), p. 67.

colleagues, Reverend Bidwell kept close ties to the Connecticut River Valley area. And as a single man with a prestigious position on the American frontier, his contact with civilization enabled him to find a wife. Colonial marriages often created powerful kinship ties that enhanced professional and social status; family power and wealth were often expanded by marital ties, and hometown connections were sustained.

Reverend Bidwell was no exception, as can be seen when he made his matrimonial alliances. It was not until October 24, 1952, that Reverend Bidwell married his first wife, Theodosia Colton, a native of West Hartford, Connecticut. Theodosia was the daughter of Reverend Benjamin Colton, who was Bidwell's theology teacher at Yale. Colton had ranked first of the two graduates in the Yale class of 1710.¹⁹

By 1752, the Bidwell house was probably completed and ready to receive the new Mrs. Bidwell.²⁰ The minister's new house was situated about five hundred yards north of the meetinghouse. Very likely, there was an earlier house elsewhere on the property, to accommodate the requirements of new settlement.²¹ The choices of materials to be used were generally limited to available and traditional New England resources of wood and stone, even for homes of the greatest distinction. Subtle differences of setting, size, interior fittings, and furnishings, would have created a display of power, wealth, and position for a man of God in the Puritan tradition.

Set on the hill just north of the meetinghouse, Bidwell's house faced south, which enabled advantageous use of sun and wind for light, heating, and cooling. Made of common local materials, a large forty-one foot by thirty-one foot dry-stone cellar foundation provided the underpinnings for the chestnut post and beam frame construction. Roof framing consisted of fourteen pairs of six inch by five inch common rafters pinned together with neither purlins nor ridge pole, because the central chimney pierced the roof ridge. On the first floor, two large and almost equal-sized front rooms, the hall and parlor, flanked the chimney

19. Dexter, *Yale Annals*, p. 639; see also *Collegio Yalensi, Catalogus*, p. 11.

20. In 1982, the Bidwell House, c. 1750, was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. In 1990, it began operations as a museum.

21. E. M. Bidwell, "Bidwell," in *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, XXVII (Boston, 1873): 193.

cellar foundation provided the underpinnings for the chestnut post and beam frame construction. Roof framing consisted of fourteen pairs of six inch by five inch common rafters pinned together with neither purlins nor ridge pole, because the central chimney pierced the roof ridge. On the first floor, two large and almost equal-sized front rooms, the hall and parlor, flanked the chimney and the front entry hall. Both rooms connected to the kitchen, at the back of the house. The second floor also contained two front rooms, which flanked the chimney and stair hall, and both connected to a cramped rear area over the kitchen. A full attic occupied the third floor.



Two additions to Rev. Bidwell's House were constructed by 1836, to create "a large dwelling house." Photo by the author.

Architecture reflected much about how the owner of a house wanted to be publicly viewed. During the mid-eighteenth century, a new architectural fashion swept up the Connecticut River Valley, the gambrel roof and elaborately-detailed front entry, with double doors. Reverend Bidwell chose instead a typical example of a mid-eighteenth century Connecticut Valley hall and parlor center-chimney saltbox house, the design of which reached back into time. Many Connecticut houses in the Suffield,

East Windsor, and Simsbury areas, near Hartford, with which Bidwell was familiar, were of the traditional saltbox style.²² Perpetuation of the building form in the western New England wilderness was most likely to be related to its familiarity by those who settled the new frontier. Reverend Bidwell may have chosen the conservative mainstream fashion, in order to provide representative support for his professional standing in the community, as a symbol of solidity with the past, as a connection to civilization, and by extension, as confidence in the future.

On April 30, 1759, Reverend Bidwell sold approximately sixty acres of his farm, in exchange for "the sum of Twelve pounds Lawful Money"²³ By extension, neither the church nor the Township owned the land which had been "set apart" for the minister. The transfer of property was witnessed, and then recorded by the Registrar of Deeds. Approximately 220 acres remained of Reverend Bidwell's original property rights.

After seven years of marriage and leaving no children, Theodosia died on June 8, 1759, at the age of thirty-seven. She was buried in Township Number One's burying ground.²⁴ Sixteen months later, on October 16, 1760, Reverend Bidwell married his second wife, Jemima Devotion (1721-1771). Jemima was the daughter of the Reverend Ebenezer Devotion of Suffield, Connecticut, a graduate of the Harvard College class of 1707.²⁵ Her maternal grandfather was the Reverend Edward Taylor of Westfield, Massachusetts.²⁶ Not only was Jemima a first cousin to Theodosia Colton, Reverend Bidwell's first wife, she was also a first cousin to Ezra Stiles (1727-1795), whose grandfather was also Reverend Taylor. Stiles, a 1746 graduate of the Yale Divinity School, was named president of Yale in 1778 and he served in that capacity until his death in 1795. Jemima gave birth to two sons and two daughters during eleven years of marriage: Adonijah, who was born on August 6, 1761, Barnabas, who was born on

22. Anthony N. B. Garvan, Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial Connecticut (New Haven, 1951), pp. 118-123.

23. Deed to John Kellogg, from Adonijah Bidwell, Tyringham Minister, April 13, 1759, in "Colonial Records," Book I (Great Barrington Registrar of Deeds).

24. Bidwell, Family, p. 25.

25. Dexter, Yale Annals, p. 640.

26. American Ancestry, p. 10.

August 23, 1763, Jemima, who was born on January 26, 1765, and Theodosia, who was born on November 29, 1766.²⁷

Between 1760 and 1771, the Reverend and Jemima Bidwell experienced changes within their family and in their land holdings, as well as in the church, the Township, and the county. In June of 1761, Berkshire County was created out of Hampshire County, and Great Barrington was designated as the seat of the county government.²⁸ And certainly another symbol of growth and civilization occurred on March 6, 1762, when Township Number One was officially incorporated and named Tyringham.²⁹ In the new town of Tyringham, there were fifty-one houses, fifty-five families, and 336 inhabitants, concentrated mostly along and south of the primary east-west Town Road.³⁰ To accommodate the burgeoning hilltop community, new roads were laid out and old ones altered. As towns and populations grew in the south Berkshire region, funds were appropriated by 1764 for the first Berkshire County Courthouse, which was planned for Great Barrington, only seven miles west of Tyringham.³¹ And by 1765, the church in Tyringham had grown from its original eight members to about fifty members.³²

Amid the regional and local activity which occurred, Reverend Bidwell's mother, who lived in Wintonbury, Connecticut, died on February 14, 1763, at the age of seventy.³³ Then, on May 25, 1764, Tyringham Town Meeting minutes record that Reverend Bidwell purchased forty acres of land that was being "Sold at Public Vendue for non-payment of taxes. . ."³⁴ The addition of the forty acres created a total of 260 acres owned by the Bidwells. In her forty-third year, Jemima Devotion

27. Dexter, Yale Annals, p. 640.

28. Bush, Berkshire, pp. 104 and 108-109.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 280.

30. Julius Miner and Margery Mansfield, Stories of the Town -- Its Church (Monterey, n.d.), p. 38.

31. Bush, Berkshire, p. 280.

32. Miner and Mansfield, Stories of the Town, p. 38.

33. Bidwell, Family, p. 15.

34. Tyringham town meeting, May 25, 1764, in "Colonial Records," II: 823.

Bidwell died, on February 7, 1771, and she was buried in the Town burying ground.³⁵

By the late 1760s, English taxation of its American colonies began to create civil unrest. Definite differences of opinion arose and divided townspeople into Tory and patriot camps, often according to economic and social standing. By the 1770s, the residents of Berkshire County could be heard expressing their opposition to the political and economic infringements that the English had imposed.³⁶ During the tumultuous period of political unrest, on October 28, 1772, Reverend Bidwell married his third wife, Ruth Kent (1730-1815) of Suffield, Connecticut.

In 1776, Reverend Bidwell was sixty years old, and he had two sons; Adonijah was fifteen years old, and Barnabas was thirteen. The population of Tyringham had grown to 806, according to the 1776 census.³⁷ A letter to the "Inhabitants of the Town of Tyringham" from Reverend Bidwell, dated March 28, 1778, described a local crisis that began in 1774.³⁸ The letter revealed a range of issues that concerned Reverend Bidwell -- town fiscal policy and management, thoughts about the American Revolution, and his personal health. On March 30, 1778, Reverend Bidwell publicly read the letter at a meeting in the town's schoolhouse.³⁹

Reverend Bidwell had been "requested . . . to give . . . Reasons in writing" for his "conduct in leaving the Pulpit," and, he declared, "I have done it" The primary impetus behind the letter was the fact that Reverend Bidwell had "preached in this Town 4 years for which I have had no reward." Therefore, he discontinued his ministerial duties. At that time, withholding of minister's salaries was a common practice through the Housatonic Valley, for reasons from theological disagreements to simple

35. Bidwell, Family, p. 25.

36. Bush, Berkshire, pp. 114-118.

37. New England Historic Genealogical Society, Vital Records of Tyringham, Massachusetts to the Year 1850 (Boston, 1903).

38. Rev. Bidwell, Letter to Inhabitants, bound into the Tyringham town records "for the Use Edification & Benefit of future Generations."

39. *Ibid.*

disinterest in the church as a social institution.⁴⁰ Reverend Bidwell also wrote in reference to an added insult: "I was rated for my Poll in the year 1776," he declared, "which was shameful abuse, shameful I say, not only as it was without law and contrary to Law I was rated my sons Poll also in the year 1777 which is as injurious as the other"⁴¹

According to Bidwell's letter, he was "willing to bare my full proportion toward the extraordinary expence of the War." Whatever his "full proportion toward . . . the War" might have been at the age of sixty-two, his letter made it clear that taxation of the minister and the withholding of his salary were contrary to tradition, and therefore an outrageous act of disrespect. By virtue of the Puritan church-state of New England, and Massachusetts in particular, ministers were paid by appropriations voted by their towns and they were exempt from taxation. Breaking the contractual agreement with the minister, by non-payment of salary and then to tax him, was a violation of Commonwealth and Ecclesiastical law.

As Tyringham's minister, Reverend Bidwell was a part of the Town's debt. At issue was the Town's obligations, not simply the accountability of elected officials, but the responsibility of the townspeople as well:

...many pay their Ministers rates years before he receives it and think the Minister gets it in Season and find out some years after that the Minister has not recd it and why? The Money in the Town Treasury was the Towns Money & if the Select men have a right to use that Money as they please, I allow tis the Towns Money while in the Treasury & to be usd in paying the Towns debts & not to rob Peter to pay Paul. . . .⁴²

Reverend Bidwell declared that "tis convenient now and then to enquire how the Select men have usd the Towns money or whether they have paid the Towns debts with it. . . ." To strengthen his argument, Reverend Bidwell related the

40. Chard Powers Smith, The Housatonic: Puritan River (New York, 1946), p. 235.

41. Rev. Bidwell, Letter to Inhabitants.

42. Ibid.

Revolutionary War to what was occurring in his local town and church:

- 1 Do you think that G. Britain in laying a paltry Tax on Tea, & in trying to pick the Pockets of americans, & in making & prosecuting the War with america, will get an ample Reward, for the many Millions they have spent in the Contest, beside the Deluge of Blood shed for which they must answer?
- 2 Do you think, that 5 or 6 Dollars, if you cod extort them from yr Minister, will pay for the time spent & cost made in the Contest, beside the disturbance & confusion occasiond in the Church & Town by it?
- 3 Dont you think that the present troubles in this Town Sprang from the same Principle & are prosecuted with the same Spirit, that the present contest between G Britain & America, did spring from &c?⁴³

Tyringham responded to Reverend Bidwell's statements. First, the town offered an explanation for their taxing the minister while simultaneously acknowledging a lack of communication with the townspeople:

the Town supposes the assesors for said years had Resons that appeared to be good and sufficient for their conduct in assesing mr Bidwell a Poll Tax Towards Defraing the Expencc of the war but the Town did not advise to the measure nither ware they acquainted with or had the knowledge of his being assesed of very late⁴⁴

Second to be addressed was the issue of nonpayment of salary. The town referred to the "grate and Extrodanary call for

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid.

men and money to Defend the states from the . . . unnatural Enemy" Again, within the public apology was an acknowledgement of presumption and a lack of communication:

. . . . it ws not Don with Design to wrong mr. Bidwell out of his Just Due but supposed . . . the Disposition he had shewn to the Town of leting sum of his money ly Provided he could have Intrest for the same after it had been Due one year might in some measure for their conduct⁴⁵

And finally, Tyingham voted to "Pay the whole of Mr. Bidwels sallary that is behind as soon as Posable with the Intrest after said money was Due one year" The town also informed "mr Bidwell that the usual grants have been made and assesed and collected to support the gospel according to the former custom of said Town" However, the people of Tyingham voted for the record that Reverend Bidwell should not have left his clerical duties as he had. The people of Tyingham also denied a salary increase request for Reverend Bidwell. As a final action, the town of Tyingham "voted and granted the Revd mr. Bidwells 28th year sallery of 48 pounds."⁴⁶ At that point, the matter was closed.

Two other issues were briefly mentioned in Reverend Bidwell's 1778 letter to the town of Tyingham. Listed as "a difficulty" was the condition of the meetinghouse structure. Bidwell found the almost forty year-old building to be in disrepair and not conducive to ministering to his church members. And church members must have felt that the meetinghouse was more uncomfortable than necessary too:

. . . especially in the winter season was the coldness of the Meeting-House by reason of broken windows that were not boarded up as the[y] might have been with a little cost, so teadeous was it to sit there that People said they cod not attend meeting, & perhaps some times there wodnt be

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

above 10 or 12 hearers so that I had principlaly to preach to seats which was very irksome⁴⁷

The "city upon a hill" was no longer a shining example of the first settlers' ambitions, neither for Tyringham nor for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Traditions of the old Puritan church-state were eroding. By 1778, the church was still an important New England institution. However, the Revolutionary War changed the emphasis and direction of the country's traditional institution. Politics, government, and economics, captured more than ever, the minds of the people -- events with which New England's churches could not compete. And the condition of the Tyringham meetinghouse was one symbol of the many changes that were evolving throughout New England and the new nation. Another symbol of changing times was the establishment of a Shaker community in the northern section of Tyringham during the early 1780s.⁴⁸

Compounding Reverend Bidwell's discouragement was ill health. He barely suggested in his 1778 letter that all was not well for him: "my bodily weakness was such that it was detrimental to my health to preach" ⁴⁹ Three years after Reverend Bidwell and Tyringham settled their differences, Bidwell made his "last will and Testament" on the eleventh day of July, 1781. The years had continued to take their toll; he wrote, "Being weak in Body but of sound memory (Blessed be God)" ⁵⁰ Designated in the will was the request that the "farm I now live on with the Building" be left to his first born son, Adonijah, "if he shall chose to take it." Other requirements were that Ruth Kent Bidwell receive one-third of all household furniture and one-third use of "my Dwelling House and cellar and Barn during her natural life . . ." To his sons went three-quarters of the whole estate, to be

47. Ibid.

48. Smith, *Housatonic*, p. 218; also a variety of documents concerning the Shaker community are contained within the Bidwell collections, Monterey, Mass.

49. Rev. Bidwell, Letter to Inhabitants.

50. Rev. Bidwell, Last Will and Testament, July 11, 1781, ms. in The Bidwell House, Monterey, Mass.

divided equally, while the daughters shared one quarter of the whole estate.⁵¹

After twelve years of marriage and no children by Ruth Kent Bidwell, on June 2, 1784, Reverend Bidwell died in Tyringham at the age of sixty-eight. In memory of the stalwart man who had led the community through thirty-four years of change, and who had admitted ninety members to the town church,⁵² a document detailed Bidwell's gravestone inscription:

Eternity! thou pleasing, dreadful thought!
Sacred
to the Memory of
Rev. ADONIJAH BIDWELL, A.M.
who was born at Hartford, Octobr 16th 1716,
received an education at Yale-College, was
ordained Pastor of the Church of
Christ in Tyringham, Octobr 3rd 1750, in which
character he lived greatly beloved, for his Christian
friendship, candour, charity, industry, sound
judgement and strict integrity until June 2nd 1784,
and then calmly expired, in full hopes of happy
immortality, through the merits of the Redeemer
Go, Reader,
Follow his example,
And live the life of the Righteous;
That your latter end may be like his;
For blessed are the dead, who die in the LORD.⁵³

Ruth Bidwell survived the pastor, and in 1790 she became the wife of Reverend Jonathan Judd, who graduated from the Yale Divinity School in 1741, one year after Reverend Bidwell.⁵⁴

51. Ibid.

52. John Dooly, History of the Congregational Society in Monterey, Massachusetts, 1750-1900, p. 31.

53. "Sacred memory of Rev. Bidwell," typescript in Bidwell House Collections, Monterey, Mass.

54. Dexter, Yale Annals, p. 640.

The total of Reverend Bidwell's life efforts amounted to a monetary value of 1,813 pounds in 1784.⁵⁵ His estate consisted of land, stock, wearing apparel, household furniture, saddles, bedding, farming tools, books, public securities in both continental and state currency, funds the Town owed, and private notes. Reverend Bidwell's estate included two dressing tables, five looking-glasses, sundry pictures, five candlesticks, one lantern, and a clock, which was not valued. His library was valued at forty-five pounds. There were no slaves listed. And surprisingly, for a man of his calling, no desk was inventoried.

Reverend Bidwell's estate was comfortable and not unlike that of fellow ministers who were of similar age and stature. By no means was he wealthy compared to some Berkshire County merchants, whose estates of about the same time period were at least double what Bidwell's had been.⁵⁶ However, in 1778 the town of Tyringham "supposed . . . the affluent circumstances of his Family."⁵⁷ In relation to his local community, "Reverend Bidwell was viewed to be financially well-off. His assests were derived from almost equal proportions of property and cash."⁵⁸

On July 6, 1784, Reverend Bidwell's widow and his four children entered a voluntary agreement, "desirous of a just and amicable division of the inheritance."⁵⁹ The document indicated that there was a "dwelling house, cellar, out houses and barn and ... the farm consisting of eighty acres." The impetus of Reverend Bidwell's original 1781 will remained -- however, as monetary allocations were specified, as were livestock apportionments. Through the course of Reverend Bidwell's life, the land he had acquired had dwindled to eighty acres.

At the age of twenty-three, Adonijah, the first-born son of Reverend Bidwell, accepted his father's last request, and inherited the family farm, according to the tradition of

55. Minutes of the Appraisal of Rev. Adonijah Bidwell's Estate, Tyringham, 1784, in the Bidwell House Collections.

56. Kevin M. Sweeney, "Mansion People," *Winterthur Portfolio* (Winter, 1984): 231-255.

57. Rev. Bidwell, Letter to Inhabitants.

58. Rev. Bidwell, Minutes of Estate.

59. Heirs' Division of Property, July 2, 1784, in Bidwell House Collections, Monterey, Mass.

primogeniture. Five years later, on January 15, 1789, Adonijah married Millicent Dench, the daughter of Captain and Mrs. Dench of Hopkinton, Massachusetts. During their forty-eight years of marriage, twelve children were born to them while they resided in Tyringham.⁶⁰ Not only was Adonijah a farmer, but he was also a state representative, and Berkshire County Justice of the Peace.⁶¹ He distinguished himself in the military when in 1793 Governor John Hancock commissioned him as First Lieutenant of the Massachusetts Cavalry Militia, then in 1796 as captain in the Ninth Division Cavalry.⁶²

During Adonijah's tenure on the family farm, the first meetinghouse, which had been built in the 1740s, fell to wrack and ruin, beyond the disrepair cited in Reverend Bidwell's 1778 letter to the people of Tyringham. A town decision was made in the 1780s, to build a new meetinghouse about a half-mile south of the old structure. Adonijah Bidwell was involved with the Ministerial Fund and Subscriber's Committees of the new South Tyringham church.⁶³ The decision created tension between the sparsely-populated northern section of town, which was called "Hop Brook," and the more densely-populated South Tyringham. Consequently, not one but two new meetinghouses were constructed in Tyringham in the 1790s: one in the northern sector, and one in the southern sector.⁶⁴ The result of the new structures began the erosion of the original hilltop center of Tyringham, while new town centers began to develop on opposite downward slopes of the hill.

During the 1780s, many western Massachusetts farmers experienced post-Revolutionary War economic depression. Armed insurrection resulted from property foreclosures and imprisonment

60. Bidwell, Family, p. 43.

61. A Pocket Almanac (Boston, 1796), p. 66; Adonijah Bidwell, Certificate of Appointment, March 1, 1808, July 6, 1810, November 20, 1811, and June 10, 1817, in the Bidwell House Collections.

62. Adonijah Bidwell, Certificate of Appointment, June 7, 1793, in Bidwell House Collections; A Pocket Almanac, p. 114.

63. Tyringham South Meeting Houe Association, meeting, February 2, 1798; Subscribers to the Ministerial Fund, Tyringham, Mass., n.d.; and An Account of all the Subscriptions for Building the South Meeting House, Tyringham, Mass., December, 1800, all in the Bidwell House Collections.

64. Bush, Berkshire, p. 283.

for failure to pay rapidly-increasing taxes. Shays' Rebellion (1786-1787) began with petitions from farmers requesting state economic reform, which included the printing of paper money. When the farmer's efforts failed to influence the state senate to undertake reforms, armed rebels began to forcibly prevent county courts from sitting to make debt judgements. The Rebellion resulted in influencing the state's ratification of the Federal Constitution, and achieving some of its legislative goals.⁶⁵

By 1800, the population of Tyringham had risen to 1,712 people, an increase of 1,376 in forty years.⁶⁶ Shortly thereafter, population began to decline, and Adonijah moved to Hillsdale, New York; land transactions from 1826 were recorded in his name.⁶⁷ By 1836, Adonijah began to sell his Tyringham property, which included the farm he had inherited from his father, Reverend Bidwell. A paper document announced:

For Sale, A Good DAIRY FARM, lying in the Town of TYRINGHAM, in the county of Berkshire, consisting of about Two Hundred and Fifty Acres of Land The Buildings, except one barn, are situated about three fourths of a mile northerly of the south meeting house. . . . the above described Property, or any part thereof, will be sold very cheap, and an extensive credit given for the purchase money, if desired, provided it is perfectly secured. For information enquire of JOHN D. BIDWELL, or BARNABAS BIDWELL, living on or near the premises, or ADONIJAH BIDWELL, of Hillsdale. HILLSDALE, January 22nd, 1836.⁶⁸

Adonijah did sell the "Good DAIRY FARM" very cheaply, and the brief tradition of primogeniture within the Bidwell family was discontinued. However, property for the

65. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-141.

66. New England Historic Genealogical Society, *Vital Records*, frontispiece.

67. *American Ancestry*, p. 10.

68. For sale notice, in Wilson Collection, Monterey, Mass. (Photocopy in Bidwell House Collections).

Bidwell farm remained about the same amount of acres as when Reverend Bidwell had first settled the land in 1750. Within three months of the "For Sale" notice, Adonijah came to an agreement with his second oldest surviving son, John Devotion Bidwell. And on April 16, 1836:

Adonijah Bidwell of Hillsdale in the County of Columbia and State of New York Esqr in consideration of the Love and Affection the said Adonijah has for his son John D. Bidwell and One Dollar paid by John Devotion Bidwell of Tyringham . . . convey unto the said John D. Bidwell a Farm lying northerly of the south Meeting House in Tyringham now in the improvement of sd J. D. Bidwell . . .⁶⁹

Adonijah Bidwell died on February 14, 1837, in Hillsdale, New York. He was buried in Tyringham.⁷⁰ The population of Tyringham was in decline, and had dropped to about 1,350, from its peak of 1,712 in 1800.⁷¹

When John Devotion Bidwell (1792-1867) purchased the property from his father for "One Dollar" in 1836, the description of the farm changed significantly from what was described in Reverend Bidwell's 1781 will. Not only had the number of barns increased from one to three, but other out-buildings had been constructed as well:

There is a large Orchard of Apple Trees thereon, -- also Peach and Plumb Trees, &c. A large Dwelling House, with an excellent well of water enclosed in the building. Three large Barns, a Cider Mill with a Corn House over it, and a wood house, with a number of other buildings, sheds, &c. A great many rods of stone fence. Also

69. Deed, April 16, 1836, in Bidwell House Collections.

70. Bidwell, Family, p. 43.

71. New England Historic Genealogical Society, Vital Records, frontispiece.

durable water in the barn yard, brought in an aqueduct with leaden pipes.⁷²

It was indeed "A large Dwelling House." At some time prior to 1836, during Adonijah's tenure, a simple two-story end-gable addition was constructed which extended from the northwest side of the original 1750s saltbox house. The addition was most likely the location of the "excellent well of water enclosed in the building."⁷³ And by the 1830s, Greek Revivalism was a primary influence on new domestic architecture. Perhaps the modest Greek Revival addition on the east side of the saltbox was built while under "the improvement of sd J.D. Bidwell," at the time he purchased his father's property in 1836.

While John Devotion Bidwell remained on the family farm, both Tyringham and the United States continued to experience change. During the 1840s, Tyringham felt the impact of Andrew Jackson's presidency and the War with Mexico. The United States gained new territory and therefore, eventually new states, such as Texas, while Tyringham lost territory. And Tyringham's population briefly surged in 1840 to 1,477, before it again began to decline.⁷⁴ Town troubles which had brewed since Reverend Bidwell's time came to a resolution when South Tyringham seceded from Tyringham. Incorporated as Monterey in 1847, the new town took its name for the 1846 Battle of Monterrey, during the Mexican War.⁷⁵ The town center shifted southward and downhill once again, toward the growing number of mills located along the Konkapot River. And by 1849, the third church, then called a meetinghouse, was completed in the center of the new town of Monterey.⁷⁶

No longer was the Bidwell family farm at the center of the town. And no longer was the town the same town that Reverend Bidwell had helped to establish. In 1853, after 103

72. For Sale Notice, in Wilson Collections, photocopy in the Bidwell House Collections.

73. Physical evidence of the well exists in the extant rear addition to the Bidwell House.

74. New England Historic Genealogical Society, Vital Records, frontispiece.

75. Myers, Hinterland, p. 11.

76. Miner and Mansfield, Stories, pp. 5 and 49.

years of Bidwell family ownership, fifty-one year-old John Devotion Bidwell sold the farm out of the family. For three generations, Bidwell's saltbox house encompassed the legitimacy of the Puritan tradition, highlighting cyclic generational manifestations of culture. It remains today as an iconic memory, inseparable from the lives of the individuals who helped maintain the social order of "a city upon a hill."