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Who Were the Pelham Shaysites?

By

Robert Lord Keyes



Figure 1. Pelham Town Hall. In original published edition, photographed by Lincoln W. Barnes. Courtesy of Pelham Free Public Library. In digitized version, image from Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association.

Who were the Pelham Shaysites?¹ Embattled farmers? A deluded mob misled by misguided leaders? Revolutionaries? Freedom fighters, who were later admired by Ronald Reagan?² For two hundred years the memory of this defeated, faceless ghost army of Daniel Shays' neighbors has haunted the Pelham woods. Pelham may have been only one town out of many to have taken up arms in 1786 and 1787, but it was the home of Daniel Shays. And it was Shays, whether he liked it or not, who gave his name to Shays' Rebellion, as if the uprising were his own child. That he and his neighbors would resort to arms in a time of crisis was not unusual. The previous generation had fought the French, and many of the Pelham Shaysites themselves were veterans of the Revolution against Great Britain. With a new time of economic stress and crisis having arrived, where livelihoods were directly threatened, Boston was now the enemy, but Boston would sweep the Shaysites off the field of battle and win the depiction of the rebellion as well. So the losers returned home to lick their wounds, get on with their lives, and, in general, forget about the whole mess. The great historical irony is that a majority of the Pelham Shaysites lived in the eastern half of the town -- and it was precisely this very same land which was seized by the state in the 1930's for the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir, built in order to supply Boston with drinking water. Old farms reverted back to woods and, as the waters rose, the memories of the landscape of 1786 and 1787 (both physical and otherwise) were further obliterated.

Who were the Pelham Shaysites? No one seems to remember. There is really little about their activities which survive in local town records, almost as if an armed rebellion in which townspeople participated never took place. Or, perhaps, they were too ashamed or resigned to their fate to make much of a record of it. What contemporary

¹ Permission to quote has been granted by the Massachusetts Historical Society. The author wishes to express his thanks to Kathleen M. Keyes, Paul L. Keyes, Frank L. Mellen, and to numerous genealogical correspondents, without whom this paper could ever have been written.

² "Proclamation 5598 of Jan. 13, 1787. Shays' Rebellion Week and Day, 1987. By the President of the United States of America." *Federal Register* 52, no. 11, Jan. 16, 1987, 1897.

accounts there are often color commentaries by the other side, who had won, and who had political agendas to advance.³

Gregory H. Nobles, in his otherwise fine essay, “Shays’ Neighbors: The Context of Rebellion in Pelham, Massachusetts,” lists only six of Shays’ “neighbors” by name, and all of them from a single source.⁴ If it may be too late to divine what might have been in the minds of the Pelham insurgents, could we still, perhaps, attempt to understand who they were?

Daniel Shays’ Pelham was a town into which he had moved only six years previously. Pelham was founded by Scotch-Irish Presbyterian immigrants along with a few allied families of Scotch and French Huguenot descent. The immigrants had landed in Pelham after a long migration process spanning several generations and two continents, from Scotland to Ulster (after 1610), to New England (in 1718), and then to Worcester and surrounding communities.⁵ But, after twenty years as a kind of second class culture in Yankee Congregationalist Worcester, these groups of Scotch-Irish were anxious to relocate elsewhere.

When land that became the town of Pelham came onto the market, the Scotch-Irish quickly formed a proprietorship company of sixty shareholders and grabbed it.⁶ The town was surveyed and settled in short order and achieved township status in 1743, the same year in which it also settled its first minister, Presbyterian Rev. Robert Abercrombie, from Edinburgh. In American history, the Scotch-Irish had something of a stereotypical reputation for being unruly characters and tenacious fighters, and who often settled border areas. Or, just the sort of folk

³ For many years after, the views of unsympathetic Federalist historians defined Shays’ Rebellion. Most influential was George Richards Minot, *The History of the Insurrections in Massachusetts in the Year Seventeen Eighty Six and the Rebellion Consequent Thereon*, (1788; rpt. Boston: James W. Burditt, 1810).

⁴ Gregory H. Nobles, “Shays’ Neighbors: The Context of Rebellion in Pelham, Massachusetts,” in *In Debt to Shays: The Bicentennial of an Agrarian Rebellion*, ed. Robert A. Gross (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), p. 198. [Nobles’ essay hereafter cited as Nobles: *Neighbors*. *In Debt to Shays* hereafter cited as Gross.] Nobles’ essay was originally presented in 1986.

⁵ C.O. Parmenter, *History of Pelham, Mass. from 1738 to 1898* (Amherst, MA, 1898), pp. 8-10.

⁶ Parmenter, p. 10.

whom an established population might want residing along their border with the wilderness.⁷ Pelham, in 1738, was the first settled community in the area between the Connecticut Valley of Western Massachusetts, founded a hundred years previously, and the Worcester settlements in the east. Early town history is colored with petty disputes among the townspeople on any number of subjects. Yet, with the exception of a couple of well publicized incidents where Pelham mobs attacked Connecticut Valley authorities in 1762 and 1775,⁸ the Pelham Scotch-Irish appear to have gotten along reasonably well with their Yankee neighbors, now that they had a place of their own. Rev. Abercrombie, for example, had very good relations with his Congregationalist brethren.⁹

But Daniel Shays' Pelham, just after the Revolution, was in the process of demographic change. While Pelham's population continued to rise from 729 in 1776 to 1,040 in 1790 (finally peaking at 1,278 in 1820),¹⁰ its Scotch-Irish Presbyterians were being crowded by Yankee

⁷ Pelhamites were keenly aware of their Scotch-Irish heritage of struggle with England. In the town's Nov. 16, 1773, reply to the Boston Committee of Correspondence, Pelham declared: "We Reflect Back also upon the unhapy Reigns of the Steuart family & bloody Struggles a free people to Nonresistence and Passive obedince -- We have Still a More feeling Sense of the worth of our Liberties by the total loss of them in the Conquered kingdom of Ireland Where altho made of the Same one Blood they have a yoke of Iron Put upon there necks ... This so grivious a yoak upon the Western Isle which Neither they nor their fathers were able to Bear has Driven them by hundreds and thousands to bide a final, adue to their otherwise Dear Native land & Seek apeaceful Retreet from the Voice of oppressions in this American Wilderness --" Pelham Town Meeting Record Book, 1743-1787, 45. Pelham Town Clerk's Office.

⁸ Parmenter, 113; "Pelham in Shays' Rebellion" [no author] in *Shays' Rebellion: Selected Essays*, ed. Martin Kaufman (Westfield, MA: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, 1987), p. 83.

⁹ Scotch-Irish Presbyterians were the first non-native, non-black people to settle in Hampshire County who were not English. Their initial reception by county residents may have been less than warm, but this changed, and the two groups appear to have gotten along. The Scotch-Irish were, in fact, better received than other groups, including the Baptists and Episcopalians. For analysis of this issue, see Mary Catherine Foster, "Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1729-1754: A Covenant Society in Transition" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1967) 213, 237-249.

¹⁰ *History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts*, (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1879) I:107.

Congregational newcomers from Plymouth County, in southeastern Massachusetts. In time, they would be completely replaced by them. The “frontier,” as it turns out, was open to anyone. This process of change in Pelham has not yet been studied and is still little understood. In 1786, it was still in its early stages. But by 1800, and certainly by 1820, Pelham had forever changed. The Scotch-Irish founding families had died out, moved on, or were assimilated. Pelham became like its neighbors: Yankee Congregationalist.

This is a topic for another time. This article seeks to examine the Pelham Shaysites of 1786 and 1787. Those specific individuals who chose to put themselves at risk by taking up the gun against their government. Were the Pelham Shaysites closely tied to their community or just on the fringe of it? Why did Pelham so quickly seem to want to divest itself of any memory of the matter? The battles of Shays’ Rebellion will not be re-fought here and even the economic aspects of the conflict, as important as they are, are for future consideration. It is enough of a start if we can put a face upon Daniel Shays’ anonymous embattled neighbors.

The identification of the Pelham Shaysites is part of a larger research project by this author to document every individual and family who ever lived in the town of Pelham prior to the establishment of the Quabbin Reservoir.¹¹ This project, which is still continuing, is part historical and part genealogical. In the absence of more informative contemporary historical records, the past must be sifted through as an archaeologist sifts through the soil. This is done by preparing extensive town genealogies, using standard genealogical methods and sources. In addition to reviewing local records, this author also utilized a variety of published and unpublished genealogical texts. This author corresponded with over 150 family historians over an eight-year period, though, of

¹¹ A Pelham historical database has been assembled by this author which identifies individuals and families in the town’s history. This has been compiled from information in the archive collections of the Town of Pelham; the Pelham Historical Society; the Pelham Free Public Library; Swift River Valley Historical Society New Salem, MA; Metropolitan District Commission, Quabbin District, Belchertown, MA; Special Collections, the Jones Library, Inc., Amherst, MA; Hampshire County Registry of Deeds, Northampton, MA; Town of Belchertown; among others, and from extensive genealogical correspondence with Pelham descendants. The Town of Shutesbury refused access to its public records. Information from this project is available through the Pelham Free Public Library.

course, not every Pelham line ran back to a Shaysite descendant, nor even a majority of them. But an identification of Pelham Shaysites has been one of the fortunate by-products of the compilation of this historical mosaic. The Pelham Shaysites were a subset of the whole.

The names of the Pelham Shaysites have never actually been in question, though their identities and even their numbers have been.¹² The standard source for identification of a Shaysite has been the oaths of Allegiances, a pledge to civil authorities that the insurgents were required to make in the spring of 1787. These oaths are found in the series, "Massachusetts Archives," in Volume 190.¹³ The oaths do omit a few known Pelham leaders, who were on the run at the time they were taken. In order to compensate for that and to provide as complete a picture as possible of the Pelham Shaysites, two additional sources have been included. The first is Sarah Peebles McCulloch's 1787 petition to Gov. Bowdoin asking her step-son, Henry McCulloch's, life be spared after conviction for treason.¹⁴ This document, quoted by Nobles, adds four more names. The second document is the 1787 "Black List" (or "Watch List") of Pelham Shaysites prepared by Massachusetts Attorney General Robert Treat Paine.¹⁵ Ten men are listed, including Daniel

¹² Daniel Shelton, "Elementary Feelings: Pelham, Massachusetts in Rebellion" (Honors thesis, Amherst College, 1981), p. 94. A copy of this paper is in Archives Collection, Pelham Historical Society.

¹³ Massachusetts Archives, vol. 190. [Hereafter cited as MA 190.] This series is located in Massachusetts Archives at Columbia Point, Boston. The author consulted a microfilm copy at University of Massachusetts-Amherst Library. One page of Pelham area oaths is reproduced in Gross, pp.37-38. (Parmenter's transcription of this page contains several errors. See Parmenter, 389-390.)

¹⁴ Sarah McCulloch to Gov. James Bowdoin, 7 May, 1787, Massachusetts Archives, vol. 189, 302. [Hereafter cited as MA 189.] "[H]e has been, by the influences of a number of Men in town, in several insurrections, his passions have been in many instances raised unduly, by going in company with others, and freely using strong liquors has been guilty of rash expressions, which upon cool reflections he heartily lamented...Capt. Shays, Capt. Daniel Gray, Thompson, Capt. Cowden & Capt. Conkey who all belong to Pelham and have been considered by him & others as Men of Judgement & Prudence, have been the means of his unhappy fall. These persons he has been taught to believe, and obey, as officers of the town."

¹⁵ Robert Treat Paine Papers, Roll 17, Massachusetts Historical Society. [Hereafter cited as Paine Papers.] The ten Pelham names listed on the "Black List" are Capt. Daniel Shays, Capt. John Conkey, Capt. John Thompson, Capt. David Cowden, Dea. Daniel

Shays as “Generalissimo.” We have also taken the liberty to add Conkey’s Tavern owner, William Conkey, Sr., who appears on none of these lists, but was well known as actively supporting the insurgents.¹⁶

There are still problems with these sources. As the oaths were subscribed before county Justices of the Peace, documents may contain signers from one or more towns, sometimes with the residence clearly identified and sometimes not. It often takes careful reference to local and genealogical sources to identify a signer’s residence. In addition, the “Black List” also identifies Capt. Reuben Dickinson and a “Capt. Oliver” as both being from Pelham. They were not.¹⁷

Identification of Pelham Shaysites has been attempted four times previously, in varying degrees. All authors based their findings on Massachusetts Archives, Vol. 190. C.O. Parmenter [1898]¹⁸ listed 69 individuals, not counting Shays, McCulloch, etc. His list, however, contains both transcription errors and individuals from other communities. Daniel Shelton [1981]¹⁹ listed 84 individuals, which was pretty accurate as far as it went. Nobles [1985]²⁰ found 103 Pelham names in the oaths, but thought “that number too high.” He suggested a final total of ninety, which he concluded represented “41.5 percent of the 217 polls on the [Pelham] 1784 valuation.” Nobles [1986]²¹ revisited the

Gray, Dr. Nehemiah Hinds, Henry McCulloch, Lt. Timothy Packard, Capt. Oliver and Capt. Reuben Dickinson. The names of Thompson, Hinds, McCulloch and Oliver were also crossed out. This document is reproduced in Gross, p. 40. The author thanks Shirley Freitas for her research in the Paine Papers and for obtaining copies.

¹⁶ Parmenter, pp. 366, 378, 379.

¹⁷ Capt. Reuben Dickinson was an Amherst Revolutionary War figure. Capt. Oliver has not been identified. See Edward W. Carpenter and Charles F. Morehouse, *The History of the Town of Amherst* (Amherst, MA, 1896), pp. 78-81, 121, 123. [Hereafter cited as Carpenter and Morehouse, *Amherst*.]

¹⁸ Parmenter, pp. 389-390.

¹⁹ Shelton, pp. 106A-106E.

²⁰ Gregory H. Nobles, “The Politics of Patriarchy in Shays’ Rebellion: The Case of Henry McCulloch,” in ed. Peter Benes, *Families and Children*, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife Annual Proceedings 1985 (Boston: Boston University, 1987) 44n.

²¹ Nobles: *Neighbors*, 368n.

subject and held to his earlier figures and placed the 90 Pelham Shaysites into the context of a town population estimated at 868 in 1784 and known to be 1040 in 1790.

This author's own review of the three primary sources has arrived at a preliminary figure of 108 individuals listed as being Pelham Shaysites. However, seventeen of these individuals (several of whom are published in Parmenter) clearly are from other towns. The remaining figure, 91, does indeed appear to be the most accurate "head count" of Pelham Shaysites at which we can arrive.

Unfortunately, twelve of these individuals cannot be found in additional local records, nor have they yet turned up in the genealogical literature. They may yet do so, as it does appear they were resident in Pelham in 1787, if only for a short period. Perhaps these were some of the transients passing through Pelham of whom Shelton speaks of.²² In any event, they have been labeled as "nothing further known," as their histories are largely blank. Of the twelve, nine do have the same last names as families who were resident in town, but no connections have yet been found. One thing that can be said with certainty, however, is that each and every one of these individuals had left Pelham by the 1790 census. They had no long-term stake in the community, though they may not have known that in 1786 and 1787.

One can also wonder whether the figure of 91 Shaysites might even be too low for Pelham. The list does not include many members of the Crossett, Hamilton and Hunter families, for example. There are no Taylors, Maklems, Berrys, etc. Why? Did some of the Shaysites not sign the oaths, thus evading their association with the rebellion in history? It seems quite possible, assuming members of these families were insurgents.

Of the remaining 79 individuals, each and every one of them does appear on a local or genealogical record for Pelham somewhere--and for a majority of them, we have any number of references. This gives us a substantial group that we can examine.

We can determine the approximate age of 73 of these individuals in 1787. The median age of the Pelham Shaysites was 33.75 years. Five individuals were age 19 (6%), 28 were age 20-29 (38%), 21 were age 30-39 (28%), eleven were age 40-49 (15%) and eight were age 50 years or older (10%). Sixty-seven percent of the Pelham Shaysites were between

²² Shelton, pp. 87, 108.

age 20 and 39. William Conkey, Sr., the tavern-keeper, was the oldest at age 70 (which probably explains why he didn't roam about the countryside packing a firearm). Daniel Shays, at 40, was older than 75% of the rest of the Pelham insurgents. Sarah Peebles McCulloch's "tender child" Henry McCulloch, of whom we will hear more later, was age 36, and older than 65% of his comrades. He must have felt the eyes of many younger men looking towards him for leadership or as a role model, in spite of his later contrite near-denials.²³

Of 78 Pelham Shaysites for whom we can identify an ethnic background or geographic migration pattern, 57 of them (73%) were Scotch-Irish. (This figure includes a few Scotch and a French Huguenot descendant who were allied with the Scotch-Irish).²⁴ These 57 Pelham Shaysites were from the founding and early resident families of the town. Fifteen of the Pelham Shaysites (19%) had moved to Pelham from Plymouth County towns prior to the rebellion. Five additional Pelham Shaysites (6%)--including Daniel Shays -- were traced to Central Massachusetts towns. Several of these individuals could have been either Scotch-Irish or previously resident in Plymouth County. Only one individual was from west of the Connecticut River.

Pelham Shaysites are beginning to look more and more as if they were an integral part of their community, and who had a long-term stake in it. Fifty-nine of 78 Shaysites (76%) were married in 1787 and 56 of 76 individuals (74%) had children. Even granting that many Pelham Shaysites may have been young fathers with only one or two small children, with some possibly still living at their parents' homes, they did have family responsibilities to consider when they decided to take an active part in armed resistance to state authority. This is a sobering thought, considering how the Shaysites have sometimes been portrayed as little better than drunkards.²⁵

Of the 91 Pelham Shaysites, 42 individuals (46%) were found to have served in the Revolution.²⁶ Undoubtedly this figure was higher.

²³ Henry McCulloch to Gov. James Bowdoin, May 7, 1787, MA 189, pp. 303-304.

²⁴ The Crossett family was one of the French Huguenot families among the Scotch-Irish. See Francis A. Plimpton, *Crossett Genealogy* (Chicago, 1937), pp. 1-3.

²⁵ Nobles: *Neighbors*, p. 197.

²⁶ *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War*, comp. Secretary of the Commonwealth (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1896), 17 vols.; Parmenter, pp. 345-355.

Twenty-five of the 42 were Pelham Scotch-Irish. Thirteen were individuals from Plymouth County -- seven seeing service for Plymouth towns, six already resident in Pelham when they joined. Six Pelham Shaysites had also done service during the French and Indian War, all from Pelham.²⁷ While each and every individual Pelham insurgent was probably not a "grizzled veteran," some were joining engagements at Bunker Hill, the second Saratoga, Monmouth, and other places. The Pelham Shaysites apparently knew what a gun was for and how to use it.

It probably goes without saying that the Pelham Shaysites resided in all the different parts of town. However, with the help of tax records, deeds, and the like,²⁸ it is not that difficult to locate 79 individuals within a specific parish, and 67 individuals within a specific neighborhood.

In 1787, Pelham was divided into East and West Parishes, each with its own meetinghouse. The West Branch of the Swift River formed the parish boundary. East Pelham, or East Parish, was the eastern-most third of the town. West Parish was twice as large geographically and also included the village of Packardville, a neighborhood in south Pelham annexed from Belchertown the previous year. Pelham was, in geographical shape, a rectangle, when laid out in 1738: 3 1/2 miles wide (north to south) and seven miles long (east to west). The Pelham Town Hall on West Hill was positioned at the very geographical center of the town. The West Branch was a mile and a half to the east, flowing through Pelham Hollow, a narrow river valley between West Hill and its twin-like companion, East Hill.

Strictly speaking, 55 Pelham Shaysites, or 70%, lived in West Parish, while 24 Shaysites, or 30%, lived in the East. But these figures are greatly misleading. If the 13 individuals who lived on the west side of Pelham Hollow are added to the 24 individuals who lived in East Parish, the number of Pelham Shaysites residing in the Hollow or to the east is 37, or 47%. Further, if the 14 individuals who resided in all lands presently part of the Quabbin Watershed (essentially all land east of present U.S. Route 202, Daniel Shays Highway, and including Packardville), the figure rises to 51 Pelham Shaysites, or 65%. This

²⁷ Parmenter, pp. 341-345.

²⁸ Archives collection, Town of Pelham; Hampshire County Registry of Deeds, 33 King St., Northampton, MA 01060.

would constitute individuals living in the area originally designated as the “East End” of Pelham (excluding Packardville). But, to continue, if the six Shaysites who lived on West Hill, near the Pelham Town Hall, were also included, one arrives at the startling realization that 57 of the 79 Pelham Shaysites--or 72%--lived either near the Pelham Town Hall, or in the sections to the east and southeast of it. (This is approximately the land seized by the state in order to create the Quabbin Reservoir one hundred fifty years later.)

Considering that the entire town was settled at the same time, one seeks an explanation for this lopsided number. Why were so many of the Pelham Shaysites in the east end of the town? The answer is not yet clear. Certainly West Pelham bordered on the Connecticut Valley with its one hundred years of prior settlement, while East Pelham slipped into a “frontier” area where its neighboring towns were settled afterwards. West Pelham’s lands may have not been quite as rocky as the east. The west certainly did not have the Hollow which, running north and south, acted as a kind of barrier between the two parishes. Do these figures suggest that East Pelham was less developed than West Pelham at the time of Shays’ Rebellion? They might.

On the local political front, many of the Pelham Shaysites also served, or would come to serve, in the highest political position in town government, namely as a member of the Board of Selectmen.²⁹ The Pelham board consisted of five individuals during this period, often representing different neighborhoods. Of the 91 Pelham Shaysites, ten had already served terms as selectman in 1787 and another five had previously served and would again serve after the revolution. These fifteen individuals constitute 16% of all the Pelham Shaysites. In addition, another fourteen Pelham Shaysites would later, at some time during their lives, also serve in this office. Thus, 29 of the 91 Pelham Shaysites at one time were Pelham Selectmen! This is 32% of all Pelham men who took part in the rebellion. Service in this office clearly demonstrates that a core group of Pelham Shaysites had deep-rooted community ties, which continued after the rebellion. The roster of Pelham Shaysites has more of the character of a convention of candidates than it does a group of transients, drifting through town.

What became of the Pelham Shaysites? Were they run out of town after the rebellion, too discouraged or afraid to remain? The answer

²⁹ Parmenter, pp. 503-505. Parmenter’s list contains several transcription errors.

appears to be that Shays' Rebellion may actually not have had much of an effect on out-migration. People certainly came and went. Pelham's population was increasing, with growing families and new neighbors. With this population rise, with limited prospects, many of Pelham's second and third sons would have probably left town anyway.

Of 91 Pelham Shaysites, including the twelve "nothing further knowns," 30 individuals (33%) do not appear after the 1790 census. Certainly we know several of the leaders were forced to flee Pelham, including Shays himself.³⁰ Henry McCulloch and Dea. Daniel Gray left temporarily. Several others also left town for good in the days following the rebellion, at least we no longer have local records for them after 1787, 1788, or 1789. But this 33% might just, in fact, represent a normal turnover rate of young adult males for this period. And, they were just as rapidly being replaced by other young adult males (some with families) from the east.

Looking forward, we find 24 Pelham Shaysites (26%) who were known to have died in their beds either in Pelham or in that section of East Parish which became part of the town of Prescott in 1822. Another six Pelham Shaysites may have been paupers in the Pelham area and may have died either in Pelham or Prescott without their deaths (and burials) ever having been recorded. (Perhaps as many as 25% of all Pelham vital records prior to 1850 were never recorded, for whatever reason.) If these six Shaysites did die in Pelham, this means that 30 Pelham Shaysites (33%) stayed on in town until their deaths. This leaves 31 Pelham Shaysites (33%) who left town anytime after 1790 and before 1830. In most cases, the migration routes of those 31 individuals can be accounted for. Small former "ex-Pelham" communities began to appear on the newly located frontier in New York and Vermont. Pelham Shaysites moved to Salem, N.Y. (co-founded by former Pelham residents in 1764),³¹ Sandgate, Vt. (where indeed something of an ex-Shaysite community appeared for a while after 1787, with Daniel Shays himself in residence),³² Madison, N.Y. (to which as many as 60 former Pelham

³⁰ David P. Szatmary, *Shays' Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst, MA, 1980), pp. 107-108.

³¹ Parmenter, pp. 403-411.

³² Robert Lord Keyes, "Former Pelham, Massachusetts Residents Listed on Sandgate, Vermont Deeds, 1782-1802," (unpublished manuscript, 1995). Available through Pelham Free Public Library.

residents moved after 1791),³³ and Marcellus, N.Y. (after 1801).³⁴ Other individual former Pelham Shaysites turn up in isolated communities elsewhere across the Vermont and New York frontier.

Interestingly, and probably not coincidentally, the location of burials of Pelham Shaysites in town reflects the residence pattern that we have previously discovered. We can identify the burial locations of 21 Pelham Shaysites. (Several others have been lost or these individuals died as town paupers and were buried without inscribed gravestones.) Fifteen Pelham Shaysites are buried in Pelham Hollow Cemetery,³⁵ originally known as the “East End” cemetery when opened before 1780 and located within a quarter mile of the West Branch in Pelham Hollow, East Parish. Six Pelham Shaysites were buried in Cook-Johnson Cemetery,³⁶ originally known as the “West End” cemetery when opened in 1771, and located about a mile west of the Town Hall. The 15 Pelham Hollow burials are 71% of the total of known Pelham Shaysite burials in town. Recall that we earlier ascertained that 72% of the Pelham Shaysites lived either near the Town Hall I or in the half of the town to the east and southeast of it.

Surprisingly, there are no known Pelham Shaysite burials in Pelham Hill Cemetery, the original town cemetery laid out behind the Town Hall.³⁷ The cemetery today contains numerous fieldstones and only a few inscribed gravestones. Pelham Hill Cemetery was laid out in 1738 and

³³ Robert Lord Keyes, “Pelham, Massachusetts Residents with Ties to Madison, New York,” (unpublished manuscript, 1998). Available through Pelham Free Public Library.

³⁴ Robert Lord Keyes, “Pelham, Massachusetts Residents Who Moved to Marcellus, New York,” (unpublished manuscript, 1996). Available through Pelham Free Public Library.

³⁵ Burials in Pelham Hollow Cemetery were for the most part reinterred in Quabbin Park Cemetery in Ware, Massachusetts in the 1930’s in the wake of the construction of the Quabbin Reservoir. The site of the former Pelham Hollow is now under water. See Metropolitan District Water Supply Commission, “Gravestone Recordings: Pelham Hollow Cemetery, Prescott, Mass.,” (cemetery listing, 1927), Metropolitan District Commission, Quabbin Visitor’s Center, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007.

³⁶ Robert Lord Keyes, “Pelham, Massachusetts Cemeteries: Two Indexes,” (unpublished manuscript, 1991), Pelham Town Clerk’s Office.

³⁷ Ibid.

probably reflects the “actuary tables” for the town’s founding generation. (Just who is buried in Pelham Hill Cemetery is a question for another day.) By the 1770’s, there was need to establish cemeteries in each of the separate parishes. These are where the Shaysites were to be buried, representatives of the “next generation” of the town.

One of the “unknown” Pelham Shaysite burials may be that of Henry McCulloch, who was convicted of treason for his role in the rebellion, though later pardoned after much agitation. Henry lived in the vicinity of 290 North Valley Road in West Parish.³⁸ After the rebellion he held a series of minor town offices, was dogged by poverty, and finally fell completely out of local records after 1824.³⁹ He does not appear on the 1820 Pelham census and is not listed on the 1822 “Division of Paupers” between Pelham and Prescott. Henry’s wife, and at least half of his family, went to Martinsburg, N.Y. Family Historian Salome Hamilton, a former Shutesbury resident and descendant of the Pelham Hamilton family, writing in 1894,⁴⁰ says that Henry died in Pelham in 1819. If true, he undoubtedly died as a pauper and would have been buried like one --without an inscribed gravestone. The best guess is that his remains today lie in Cook-Johnson Cemetery, near to those of his stepmother, Sarah Peebles McCulloch. Alas, Sarah’s stone is smashed almost beyond recognition, sticking up out of the black earth like a broken tooth. The town has not yet seen fit to repair it.⁴¹

Pelham Shaysites also shared numerous ties of blood and marriage. There were 13 Grays, six Conkeys, six Johnsons, and five Thompsons. The four Cowans were brothers, as were the four Mellens. Out of the 91 Pelham Shaysites, 61 (67%) had at least one family relationship (either by birth or marriage) with another Shaysite. There were six fathers--William Conkey, Sr., Aaron Gray, Dea. Daniel Gray, Eliot Gray, Hugh Johnson and Dea./Capt. John Thompson, Sr. -- and fifteen sons. Forty Pelham Shaysites had a brother or half-brother who was also an

³⁸ Parmenter, p. 385.

³⁹ Pelham Tax Valuations, 1800-1830, Archives Collection, Town of Pelham.

⁴⁰ Salome Hamilton, *The Genealogy of the Hamilton Family, from 1716 to 1894* (Minneapolis: A.C. Bausman, 1894), p. 65.

⁴¹ “History Solves Grave Mystery,” *Daily Hampshire Gazette* [Northampton, MA], April 11, 1992.

insurgent; and there were numerous other relationships among the group: 12 uncles and nephews, 12 cousins, 25 brothers-in-law, four fathers-in-law and five sons-in-law.

Some of these family relationships might seem obvious. Dea. Daniel Gray was father of Joel and Lamond Gray, brother of Dea. Ebenezer Gray, uncle of Elihu Gray and John Harkness, 2nd, and brother-in-law of James Dunlap.⁴² (And, for good measure, he was also brother of Capt. Isaac Gray, about whom more will be mentioned.) The Conkeys had numerous kinship ties.⁴³ David Conkey, Sr. was son of William, Sr., brother of William, Jr., half-brother of Ezekiel and Thomas, Sr., and cousin of John Conkey, Sr. But other relationships might not have seemed so obvious because of different family names: Stephen Andrews was brother-in-law of Abiah and Uriah Southworth, for example. Joseph Thompson and Robert Crossett were also brothers-in-law.

The six Shaysites who were fathers undoubtedly wielded great influence among the group. But, more significantly, were the 40 brother and half-brother relationships among the Pelham Shaysites. With 67% of them being between the ages of 20 and 39, as we have seen, this suggests that, at the core, the Pelham Shaysites were of the same generation, or a peer group.

Leadership among the ranks may have then been asserted by the older males acting as role models. This may begin to provide some explanation for the aberrant case of Henry McCulloch. Not one of the political or military Shaysite leaders himself, not a veteran, and not related by ties of kin to any of the other Pelham Shaysites, McCulloch may have used his older age (36) to be something of either a role model, a show off, or both. Certainly McCulloch puffed up his position during the rebellion by drawing attention to himself riding a steed and carrying a cutlass.⁴⁴ He quickly changed his tune after he was arrested and put on

⁴² Anna Harrington Warner, "Some Descendants of John Gray of Worcester, Massachusetts," *The Detroit Society for Genealogical Research Magazine* X, no. 1-XVII, no. 5, October, 1952-June, 1954. [Hereafter cited as Warner.] Dea. Gray's genealogy appears in XVI, no. 3, pp. 69-70, February, 1953.

⁴³ Robert Lord Keyes, "The Conkey Family of Pelham, Massachusetts," (unpublished manuscript, 1998). Available through Pelham Free Public Library.

⁴⁴ Henry McCulloch to Gov. James Bowdoin, May 7, 1787, MA 189: pp. 303-304.

trial for his life. Not that one could blame him for trying to get out of a hanging.

The question of leadership has haunted the Shaysites, as might be expected of a group that had been militarily defeated. Daniel Shays has often been portrayed as a reluctant leader, supposedly telling his former commander, Gen. Rufus Putnam, as late as January 1787 that he would give it up “in a moment” for a pardon.⁴⁵ That may have been the case, although Gen. Putnam must be considered as a witness for the government.

The leadership of the Shaysite cause, such as it was, was in fact political, with an adjunct military wing. In Pelham, Dea. Daniel Gray was the obvious political leader.⁴⁶ Gray was grandson of one of the Scotch-Irish founders of Pelham.⁴⁷ Settling in East Parish, Gray was, by 1767, already the largest Pelham taxpayer and was both a civil and church leader, who had a pronounced sense of moral righteousness. He was moderator of the 1776 Pelham town meeting that voted for independence. On December 7, 1786, Gray gave his “Address to the People” in Worcester outlining his rationale for armed rebellion.⁴⁸

Daniel Shays was the military commander and subordinate to the political leadership. His position at the head of an army may not have been something in which he actively sought, nor one which he felt comfortable with. Historians have long wondered why Shays agreed to it in the first place. The reasons may never really be known. But Pelham tavern-keeper, John Bruce, testified before the grand jury:

“At a meeting of the people of Pelham, they applied to Shays to lead them to stop [the] August [1786] Court -- he refused-Capt. John Thompson led them to Northampton in August.... I understood

⁴⁵ Accounts traditionally have this meeting as taking place in Pelham. It seems more likely that Shays and Putnam met in Rutland, which was Putnam’s hometown, and was where Shays had been operating in December of 1786. See Minot, 89; Parmenter, pp. 395-398.

⁴⁶ Parmenter, pp. 368-369.

⁴⁷ Warner, XVI, no. 3, pp. 69-70, February, 1953.

⁴⁸ Minot, pp. 82-83.

Shays was appointed at Springfield in September [as] Commander in Chief of the insurgents....⁴⁹

Bruce's testimony reflects two important points: first, there was a position of "military leader" which was open, and, second, that Shays was still having second thoughts about taking it in August, 1786. But Dea./Capt. John Thompson, Sr., apparently did not want to continue in this position.

One might also wonder what would have happened had Capt. Isaac Gray lived. Brother of Dea. Daniel and Dea. Ebenezer, Isaac may have been the "Shaysite commander" who never was, for he died on the eve of the rebellion, on September 9, 1786, at the age of 57. Gray had served in the French and Indian War, was a Lieutenant who had turned out for the Lexington Alarm, and had commanded a company at Bunker Hill. Perhaps Gray was ill in August of 1786, when the town was turning toward Shays. But it is interesting to speculate what might have happened had Isaac Gray survived. Would he have been the military commander facing the government forces at the Springfield Armory, rather than Shays, in January of 1787? And, would his military tactics have been any better than those displayed by the unfortunate Shays?

With the successful defense of the Springfield Armory, the scattering of the Shaysites at Petersham and victory on the field at Sheffield,⁵⁰ the government had won the war. Its strategy for winning the peace was to argue that the insurgents had been "misled" by their misguided leaders, who, at that moment, were also on the run. Thus, the full weight of the government fell upon the Shaysite leadership, attempting to sever it from the body. At least this provided a rationale in coaxing the population back to the fold, even if many in the countryside really didn't believe it.

Shays never returned to Pelham to live, although some of his family remained for a time. There are indications that he may have passed through the area to wrap up his affairs at a later date.⁵¹ Henry

⁴⁹ John Bruce, Witness Testimony, Supreme Judicial Court (Hampshire County), April Term 1878, in Minutes of Criminal Trials, 1780-1789; Paine Papers.

⁵⁰ Szatmary, p. 111.

⁵¹ Elmer S. Smail, *The Family of Daniel Shays*, ed. Mary Ann Nicholson (Boston, 1987), pp. 13-14.

McCulloch was convicted of treason and stood on the gallows in a Northampton meadow until given a last minute reprieve. He was ultimately pardoned. McCulloch's trial during the spring and summer of 1787 was also Pelham's trial. McCulloch portrayed himself as contrite and ashamed of his actions while his step-mother petitioned for clemency, calling him a "tender child"⁵² who had been misled by the Pelham leadership, whom she then listed by name. Certainly the McCullochs were not such backwoods folk that they lacked the political savvy to see how Henry's salvation was tied to toeing the government line of the rebels being led astray.

Pelham townspeople did the honorable thing and circulated a petition to spare McCulloch's life.⁵³ 141 Pelham men signed the petition, a clear majority of the town's voters. Of this number, 50 signers were Pelham Shaysites (or 55% of the 91 Shaysites). Daniel Shays didn't sign. Neither did Dea. Daniel Gray. They were in Vermont. But two of Gray's Shaysite sons signed. William Conkey, Sr. didn't sign. But three of his Shaysite sons did. Even the old Pelham minister, Rev. Robert Abercrombie, who had two sons in the rebellion, signed the petition. It was one of the last recorded acts of his life. The petition was Pelham's tacit admission that Boston had won and was setting the terms.

The "roster" of Pelham Shaysites included many individuals whose lives weaved and mixed with one another, and with the history of the town, as might be expected in a small community. Isaac and James Abercrombie⁵⁴ were the sons of Rev. Robert Abercrombie who participated in the rebellion. In the succeeding years, Isaac became the most prominent resident of Pelham, holding every important position of civic leadership at least one time. He was a selectman, representative to the General Court, Town Moderator, and Justice of the Peace. In 1812, he was the town's representative to the Hampshire County Convention that called for a suspension of hostilities with Great Britain. In 1810, Isaac beat his brother James in the race for selectman by two votes. Isaac

⁵² Sarah McCulloch to Gov. James Bowdoin, April, 1787, MA 189:p. 311.

⁵³ MA 189:pp. 316-317; Parmenter, pp. 385-387.

⁵⁴ *Genealogical Histories of Abercrombie-Fuller and Allied Families*, ed. Ruth Lawrence (New York, 1930), pp. 1-9. (A copy of this book is in Special Collections, The Jones Library.) A portrait drawing of Pelham Shaysite Isaac Abercrombie, Sr. [1759-1847] appears following page 7. The "face" of a Pelham Shaysite!

later moved to Deerfield. James was also a Pelham selectman and served two terms on his own in the General Court.

William Conkey, Sr. ran the celebrated tavern in Pelham Hollow.⁵⁵ The Shaysites drilled on the front lawn of the tavern under the eye of Lt. Timothy Packard. Inside, they discussed their grievances and plans over flip and toddy. Daniel Shays lived right up the road, within a half-mile of the tavern. William came from what appears to be an almost military family. The Conkeys could always be counted on to turn out for an armed conflict. William fathered four Shaysites. He had several brothers who served in both the French and Indian War and in the Revolution. His nephew, Joshua Conkey, fought with Rogers' Rangers (Maj. Robert Rogers, himself, Scotch-Irish) and was captured at the "Battle of Snowshoes" near Ticonderoga in 1758.⁵⁶ William died in

⁵⁵ One of the persistent "Shaysite legends" which continue to circulate around the woods is the story that the site of Conkey's Tavern was flooded when the Quabbin Reservoir was constructed. Donald W. Howe reproduces a photograph in his history of the Quabbin which purports to show "the site of the Old Conkey Tavern," although Walter A. Dyer had previously written that the exact site was open to debate. Howe's photograph (probably taken by Lincoln W. Barnes) shows five individuals standing in an open field next to two 1920's style automobiles. There is no cellar hole to be seen and the caption implies, without offering any evidence, that the cellar must have been filled in. The caption reads, "the man in center is standing where the fireplace chimney was located." The story comes down to us that the site is now under water.

But there is a cellar hole on Prescott Peninsula today with a large center fireplace chimney and with walls that incline outwards, rather than perpendicular, just as Parmenter had noted. This site is located within one-half mile of the Daniel Shays homesite-and the two are connected by roadbeds. The Peninsula cellar is at a junction of former crossroads, and M.D.C. records indicate that it was located along what became the route of the Sixth Massachusetts Turnpike, or the main east-west thoroughfare through Pelham, such as it was. In other words, the cellar is located at a place where one might expect a tavern to once have been. M.D.C. records also indicate that this site was in Conkey family hands until about 1878 and Lincoln W. Barnes, perhaps not comfortable with the open field/filled in cellar story, also photographed this same cellar hole. The site has never been under water. The author thanks Paul L. Keyes for locating this site. See Donald W. Howe, *Quabbin: The Lost Valley* (Ware, MA: Quabbin Book House, 1951), p. 583; Walter A. Dyer, *Springfield Union and Sunday Republican*, September 7, 1930; Lincoln W. Barnes Photographic Collection, Special Collections, The Jones Library; Parmenter, pp. 482-487; Real Estate Files, Title nos. 357, 452, 1140 and 1140A, Massachusetts District Commission, Quabbin Division, 485 Ware Road, Belchertown, MA 01007.

⁵⁶ Carpenter and Morehouse, *Amherst*, p. 64.

1788, shortly after Shays Rebellion. His tavern remained standing for another century, until it collapsed and was burned about 1883.

Dea. Ebenezer Gray, brother of Dea. Daniel and Capt. Isaac Ebenezer, lived in “the Valley” in West Pelham. He was married twice and fathered a town record, fifteen children. Ebenezer was the church deacon whom fast-talking Dartmouth dropout Stephen Burroughs conned in 1784.⁵⁷ Burroughs talked his way past Gray and into the Pelham pulpit, giving sermons for fourteen weeks, until being discovered for the fraud that he was. This was the beginning of Burroughs’ long roguish career, and he made much of it, at the expense of the embarrassed locals. The incident must have been particularly galling to Dea. Ebenezer Gray, who lived in town all of his life, and had been one of the very first children born in Pelham, in 1743.

The Mellens were four brothers who had farms in Mellen Hollow, a steep river valley in East Pelham. Their grandfather was a Scotch-Irish church elder, and their father, one of the earliest residents of the town. In 1854, their descendant, Prescott Town Clerk, David Mellen, left a unique genealogical record of the family,⁵⁸ with numerous insights into the family, including the particular religious persuasions of the brothers. James was a faithful Presbyterian, Jeremiah and Jonathan became Calvinists, and William was “unitarian in his views.” James and Jeremiah later moved to Marcellus, N.Y., while Jonathan and William remained in Pelham.

Dea./Capt. John Thompson, Sr. settled in the northern part of Pelham Hollow, part of a very large family.⁵⁹ The Thompsons lived there for another eighty years. John was a neighbor of Thomas Conkey, Sr., across the West Branch, and of the Cowans and the Hamiltons to the south. The four Cowan brothers took part in Shays Rebellion. We lose track of two of them shortly thereafter. George died in Pelham in 1809, while his brother, James, moved to Salem, N.Y. The Thompsons, Cowans and Hamiltons were typical of the families who settled in

⁵⁷ Parmenter, p. 321.

⁵⁸ David Mellen [1783-1854], “Mellen Genealogy,” (unpublished manuscript, 1853). Original manuscript owned by Claudia Golemboski, 41 Ridge Pointe Lane, Fredericksburg, VA 22405-2749.

⁵⁹ Col. Henry Joseph Amy, *Descendants of James and Martha Thompson of Pelham, Mass.*, (Eastchester, New York, 1964), pp. 1-7.

Pelham Hollow, farming the river bottom land, engaging in traditional Scotch-Irish occupations such as weaving, and developing new trades, including shoe making and stone masonry.

Pelham stone masons were plying their trade at least fifty years before any quarry was opened in town. This was a trade for the second sons, the ones who left town looking for work -- and finding it in construction projects throughout southern New England.⁶⁰ Stone masonry, in fact, may help to explain why several of the Pelham Shaysites tumble out of the historical record after the rebellion. Not fitting into the typical migration patterns, they may have been following work rather than land.

Peg-legged Adam Johnson was single when he died in 1823. He had saved his money over the years and had been persuaded by Amherst College officials to leave that struggling institution \$4000 in his will.⁶¹ When the will was probated, his brother, Thomas (also a former Shaysite) sued. It was a case that drew the attention of many commentators, including Emerson, but Thomas lost. The money went to Amherst College. The college's first building, dedicated in 1827, was named in honor of Adam: Johnson Chapel. Interestingly, thirteen Pelham stone masons worked on its construction in 1823,⁶² including Appleton and Peter King, Jr., sons of Pelham Shaysite Peter King, Sr. King turned out to be the longest lived of the Pelham Shaysites, dying in North Amherst in 1855.

Pelham Shaysites had a number of children who lived into the 1880's, over a hundred years after the rebellion. Spinster Mary Southworth, daughter of Dr. Abiah, was the oldest sibling to remain in Pelham. She lived in the Southworth home at 377 Amherst Road until her death in 1874.⁶³ Abiah became a local physician and remained in Pelham until about 1830. His sons were paper manufacturers in South Hadley. Brother Uriah left town for Vermont six years after the rebellion, dying in Canada. Shaysite Isaac Canedy left Pelham in 1793.

⁶⁰ Cowan Family Papers, Archives Collection, Pelham Historical Society

⁶¹ Parmenter, pp. 426-428.

⁶² "Mens Names that Worked at Stone at Jonson for the Chappel 1823," Cowan Family Papers, Archives Collection, Pelham Historical Society.

⁶³ George G.S. Southworth, *Descendants of Constant Southworth*, (Salem, Ohio: Harris and Co., 1892), pp. 20-21.

But by 1811, he had returned, living as a pauper under the care of former Shaysite Capt. Moses Gray, 2nd and Patrick Gray, with the town picking up the bill. Isaac had at least two daughters who were long time paupers in town. There are over 35 references in town records for the care of the “Kennedy girls” between the years of 1822 and 1841.⁶⁴ But there are no records of the deaths and burials of either father or daughters, all of whom presumably now rest in some potter’s field section of a Pelham cemetery.

Capt. John Harkness, 2nd lived in West Pelham. He had two cousins who were Pelham Shaysites. During the Revolution, while stationed at West Point, his regiment was reviewed by General Washington.⁶⁵ John left Pelham for New York State in 1805, eventually settling in Springfield, Pennsylvania. Joseph Rankin was a weaver. He was of Scotch ancestry and settled in “the Valley” in West Pelham. At age 65, he was the second oldest Pelham insurgent. He had served in the Revolution at age 53. He died in Pelham in 1795, and his family remained in town another sixty or more years.

John Peebles, Sr. was grandson of Pelham co-founder Robert Peebles.⁶⁶ John had served in the French and Indian War and was a Revolutionary War veteran. In 1787, he was also guardian of his dead brother’s four young children. He was a blacksmith, probably the family patriarch at the time of the rebellion, and resided in the northern part of West Parish on the road to Shutesbury. The cellar hole of his large house is located but a few hundred feet from Daniel Shays Highway in the Quabbin woods.

Ezekiel Baker was one of the Pelham Shaysites who later moved to Marcellus, N.Y., leaving his farm in East Pelham in 1807. He and his wife were devout Christians. In 1811, in Marcellus, their 17-year old daughter Rachel, who had been born in Pelham, began to have a series of religious conversations, or devotions, while in her sleep.⁶⁷ They soon

⁶⁴ Pelham Town Record Books, 1816-1840, 1840-1860, Pelham Town Clerk’s Office.

⁶⁵ Capt. John Harkness, 2nd [1760-1843], Pension Application, September 10, 1832, photocopy of document in Archives Collection, Pelham Historical Society.

⁶⁶ Leslie A. Peebles, *Robert Peebles from Ulster, 1718, Patrick of Pelham, 1738...*, (Marathon, New York, 1964), pp. 167-168.

⁶⁷ Joshua V.H. Clark, *Onondaga or Reminiscences of Earlier and Later Times* (Syracuse, 1849) 2:pp. 294-296.

became full-blown orations, complete sermons praising God, lasting upwards of an hour and a half, and all given while perfectly sound asleep! On a New York frontier that was already seething with spectacular outbreaks of religious enthusiasms, Rachel Baker became known in her own right as “the Sleeping Preacher of Marcellus.”

The two physicians in East Pelham in 1786 and 1787 were both closely associated with events of the rebellion. Dr. Robert Cutler was not a Shaysite -- far from it. He was an outspoken critic of the rebellion.⁶⁸ He also had the good fortune not to have been at home one evening when a group of Shaysites came looking for him. The apocryphal (or not) story has his wife blocking the entrance to the Cutler cellar, where the spirits were located. This story later became used by opponents keen to portray the Shaysites as being persons of misplaced morals.⁶⁹ Dr. Cutler left the town in the wake of the rebellion, establishing a long-lived practice in Amherst, which was continued by his son, Dr. Isaac Guernsey Cutler. Dr. Isaac delivered over 1,300 babies in the Amherst area in the early third of the nineteenth century, including four children of former Pelham Shaysite Daniel Harkness, as well as the poet Emily Dickinson.⁷⁰ Descendant George Cutler, an Amherst merchant, owned a summer home on Butter Hill in West Pelham in the early part of this century.⁷¹ Doubtless his neighbors neither knew of his ancestry nor cared.

Dr. Nehemiah Hinds is probably the most surprising addition to the list of Pelham Shaysites. Long thought to be a Shaysite opponent,⁷² Dr. Hinds nonetheless appears on Robert Treat Paine’s “Black List” and has five witnesses testify against him in the grand jury.⁷³ Dr. Hinds was on his way to becoming the wealthiest man in East Parish. He also operated

⁶⁸ Parmenter, p. 258.

⁶⁹ Parmenter, p. 258.

⁷⁰ Dr. Isaac G. Cutler, “Lists of Births Attended, 1805-1833,” (unpublished journal), Special Collections, The Jones Library.

⁷¹ *Springfield Republican*, June 20, 1905.

⁷² Shelton, 126.

⁷³ Paine Papers.

a tavern on East Hill. It was in front of this tavern's sign that Daniel Shays is said to have "treated" or saluted his men as they broke camp in Pelham and marched to Petersham in February 1787.⁷⁴ Long time Prescott residents recall from their childhood a hole in the ledge where the sign post once stood. This hole would fill over with rainwater and was fabulous for making mud pies. While the old village at East Hill was razed during the taking of the Quabbin, the hole in the ledge still remains, located a few feet east of the Five College Radio Observatory, the only building standing on Prescott Peninsula. Dr. Hinds, unlike Dr. Cutler, remained in East Pelham and Prescott for the rest of his life.

The Pelham Shaysites were not a fringe group in their community. They were a product of it, and acted as their community and culture had acted in times past during stress and crisis: by taking action into their hands. Pelham had supplied men to both preceding wars. It was one of the first western Massachusetts towns to respond to the Boston Committee of Correspondence in 1773, doing so, in the words of one descendant, "with a tub thumper in favor of natural rights."⁷⁵ The Pelham Town Meeting of June 20, 1776, resolved "by Unanimous Vote that we are willing to Come Under Independency from under the yoke of the King of Great Britain."⁷⁶ Scotch-Irish founding families and the Plymouth County newcomers responded alike to the crisis of 1786 and 1787. Unfortunately for them, this time they lost.

In the summer of 1854, a young visitor came to Pelham (his identity has not been passed down to us).⁷⁷ He stayed at the home of Horace P. Gray in West Pelham. (Gray was, himself, a descendant of Pelham Shaysites.) Over the course of a three-week vacation, the visitor went swimming in the local brooks, chased Mr. Gray's cows through the woods, and took daily walks to various parts of town. He often walked to Pelham Hill, where the Town Clerk was more than happy to open the old town record books for him. The visitor took copious notes of sundry

⁷⁴ Parmenter, 382.

⁷⁵ Beverly J. Ellison Nelson, "Obadiah Hamilton, 1760-1828," *The Connector of the Hamilton National Genealogical Society, Inc.* 17:9 [1995]; p. 1.

⁷⁶ Pelham Town Meeting Record Book, 1743-1787, 62.

⁷⁷ "Pelham Notebook—1854," [no author], (unpublished manuscript, 1854), Special Collections, The Jones Library.

historical matters, visited the Town Hall, and even copied names off of many of the gravestones.

On the afternoon of August 26, 1854, the visitor walked to the home of Wyatt Richardson, about a mile south of the town hall, where he interviewed 98-year old Miss Sarah Abercrombie, surviving daughter of the town's first minister, who was then living there with her niece. Over the course of a pleasant couple of hours, the visitor and Miss Abercrombie talked about the old days. She was alert and able, and she conversed easily about early Pelham homes, sermons, food, dancing, quilting parties, and other subjects. But never once, apparently, did the subject of Shays' Rebellion ever come up. Sarah Abercrombie, who had two brothers under arms during the rebellion and who personally would have known a score of others, wasn't asked and didn't tell. She died four months later. With her death, a great silence fell across this chapter of the town's long history.

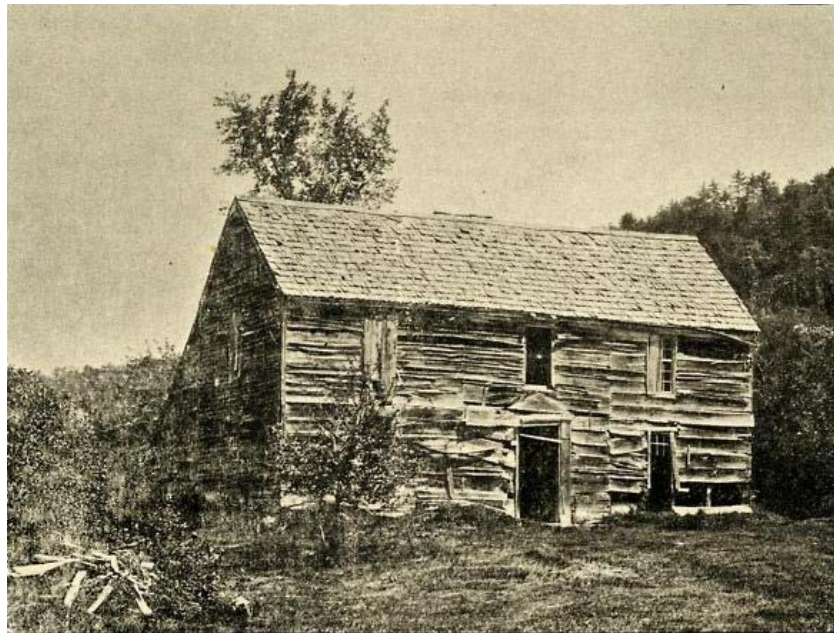


Figure 2. Conkey's Tavern. Courtesy of Jones Library, Special Collections, Amherst.

TABLE 1**PELHAM SHAYSITES, 1786-1787**

NAME AND AGE IN 1787	EVENTS
1. Abercrombie, Isaac, Sr. [1759-1847], age 28,	1, 6, 7, 9
2. Abercrombie, James, Sr. [1754-1836], age 33,	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
3. Ames, Lewis, NFK	
4. Andrews, Stephen, age ?,	3, 4, 5, 9
5. Baker, Ezekiel, Sr. [1764-1842], age 23,	2, 4, 5, 6, 9
6. Baker, James, Sr. [1756-1824], age 33,	2, 4, 6, 9
7. Baker, Jonathan, NFK, possibly [ca. 1763-1850]	
8. Baker, Nathaniel, NFK, possibly [b. 1766]	
9. Barlow, Eliakim, age ?,	2, 4, 5, 6, 8
10. Billings, Elihu, NFK	
11. Billington, Frederick, NFK	
12. Brown, Matthew, age ?,	4, 5, 6, 10
13. Bruce, John, Jr. [ca. 1746-1824], age 41,	3, 4, 5, 7, 8
14. Canedy, Isaac [b. 1746], age 41,	2, 4, 5, 6, 10
15. Cole, John, age ?,	9
16. Conkey, David, Sr. [1748-1828], age 39,	1, 4, 5, 7, 10
17. Conkey, Ezekiel, Sr. [b. 1761], age 26,	1, 4, 5, 6, 9
18. Conkey, John, Sr. [1746-1824], age 41,	1, 4, 5, 7, 10
19. Conkey, Thomas, Sr. [1758-1845], age 29,	1, 4, 5, 6, 10
20. Conkey, William, Sr. [1717-1788], age 70,	1, 4, 5, 7, 10
21. Conkey, William, Jr. [1751-1841], age 36,	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
22. Cowan, George [1757-1808], age 30,	1, 10
23. Cowan, James (II) [1761-1828], age 26,	1, 4, 5, 9
24. Cowan, Justus [b. 1765], age 22,	1, 8
25. Cowan, William Paul [b. 1767], age 20,	1, 4, 5, 8
26. Cowden, David (Capt.) [b. ca. 1724], age 63,	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
27. Crawford, Joel [b. 1767], age 20,	1, 8
28. Crossett, Robert, Sr. [1753-1811], age 34,	1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10

29. Dunlap, James (II) [ca. 1741-1815], age 46, 1, 4, 5, 7, 10
30. Edson, Jacob, Sr. [ca. 1740-1806], age 47, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
31. Elliot, George [ca. 1758-1838], age 29, 4, 5, 6, 8
32. Fuller, Thomas, NFK
33. Gray, Aaron, Sr. [1735-1805], age 52, 1, 4, 5, 7, 10
34. Gray, Daniel (Dea.) [1728-1803], age 59, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
35. Gray, Ebenezer (Dea.) [1743-1834], age 44, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
36. Gray, Elihu [b. ca. 1768], age 19, 1, 9
37. Gray, Eliot [1736-1803], age 51, 1, 4, 5, 6, 8
38. Gray, Eliot, 2nd [1753-1841], age 32, 1, 4, 5, 9
39. Gray, Joel [b. ca. 1760's], age ca. 22, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9
40. Gray, Joseph [b. 1762], age 25, 1, 6, 9
41. Gray, Lamond [1753-1812], age 34, 1, 4, 5, 6, 8
42. Gray, Matthew, 3rd [b. ca. 1764], age 23, 1, 4, 9
43. Gray, Moses, 2nd [ca. 1768-1846], age 19, 1, 7, 10
44. Gray, Patrick, Sr. [b. ca. 1760], age 27, 1, 10
45. Gray, Robert Barber [1768-1815], age 19, 1, 8
46. Hackett, George [b. ca. 1760], age 27, 2, 4, 6, 8
47. Hamilton, John, Jr., age ?, 1, 4, 5, 8
48. Harkness, Daniel, Sr. [b. 1762], age 25, 1, 4, 5, 7, 9
49. Harkness, Daniel, Sr. [ca. 1757-1816], age 30, 1, 4, 5, 6, 10
50. Harkness, John, 2nd [1760-1843], age 27, 1, 4, 5, 6, 9
51. Hinds, Nehemiah (Dr.) [1745-1825], age 42, 1, 4, 5, 7, 10
52. Hood, John [b. 1754], age 33, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9
53. Houston, David, Jr. [1759-1825], age 28, 1, 4, 5, 10
54. Houston, Robert [1758-1814], age 29, 1, 4, 5, 7
55. Hunter, John, Jr., age ?, 1, NFK
56. Hyde, Andrew [1768-1827], age 19, 1, 7, 9
57. Ingram, Jonathan [b. ca. 1759], age 28, 2, 6, 8
58. Ingram, Samuel, NFK
59. Johnson, Adam [1753-1823], age 34, 1, 10
60. Johnson, Hugh [ca. 1728-1806], age 59, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
61. Johnson, Hugh Moor [b. 1768], age 19, 1, 9

62. Johnson, James [b. 1765], age 22, 1, 8
63. Johnson, Thomas [d. after 1823], age ?, 1, 6, 9
64. Johnson, William, Sr. [poss. b. ca. 1740's], age ca. 42, 1, 4, 5, 10

65. King, James, Sr. [poss. b. ca. 1750's], age ca. 32, 2, 4, 5, 7, 9
66. King, Peter, Sr. [1757-1855], age 30, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9

67. Latham, James, Sr. [1748-ca. 1803], age 39, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10

68. McCulloch, Henry [1751-1819], age 36, 1, 10
69. McCulloch, James [b. 1766], age 21, 1, 9
70. Mellen, James Caldwell [1751-1807], age 36, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9
71. Mellen, Jeremiah [1758-1826], age 29, 1, 9
72. Mellen, Jonathan, Sr. [1764-1846], age 23, 1, 4, 5, 10
73. Mellen, William, Sr. [1756-1835], age 31, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10

74. Packard, Timothy, Sr. (Dea./Capt.) [1752-1818], age 35, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
75. Peebles, John [1741-1826], age 46, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9
76. Pettengill, Stephen, Sr. [b. 1743], age 44, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9

77. Ramsdell, Abner, Sr. [ca. 1759-1846], age 28, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
78. Rankin, Joel, NFK
79. Rankin, Joseph [1722-1795], age 65, 1, 4, 5, 6, 10
80. Rhodes, Samuel, age ?, 4, 5, NFK

81. Shays, Daniel (Capt.) [1747-1825], age 40, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
82. Snow, Jonathan, NFK
83. Southworth, Abiah (Dr.) [1760-1835], age 27, 2, 6, 7, 9
84. Southworth, Uriah [1751-1814], age 36, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9

85. Thompson, John, Sr. (Dea./Capt.) [ca. 1736-1809], age 51, 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10
86. Thompson, John, Jr. [b. 1766], age 21, 1, 8
87. Thompson, Joseph [b. 1749], age 38, 1, 4, 5, 9
88. Thompson, Thomas [b. 1753], age 34, 1, 4, 5, 6, 9
89. Thompson, Thomas, 2nd [poss. b. 1760], age 27, 1, 4, 5, 9
90. Tinkham, Joseph, Sr. [b. ca. 1759], age 28, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9

91. Westcott, Joseph, NFK

KEY: 1 - Scotch-Irish or Allied Family
2 - Plymouth County Immigrant
3 - Central Massachusetts Immigrant

4 - Married in 1787

5 - Children in 1787

6 - Revolutionary War Veteran

7 - Pelham Selectman, either before or after 1787

8 - Left Pelham about 1790 or before

9 - Left Pelham after 1790

10 - Died or probably died in Pelham or Prescott

NFK - Nothing Further Known

Source: Pelham, Massachusetts Database, compiled by author