

By Robert Barboza

At the western edge of the UMass Dartmouth campus, not far from Cedar Dell Pond, sits the home of Revolutionary War militiaman Joseph Weaver. It is a modest farmhouse, little changed since the 1700s, when Weaver and his family worked the land before and after the long war for independence from England.

The old house is carefully boarded up now, used by the university for storage purposes, its history unacknowledged but not forgotten.



Dartmouth Historical & Arts Society (DHAS) president Bob Harding, also a member of the town Historical Commission, is doing his best to make sure that the Weaver homestead is protected and preserved. He lectured on the life and times of the Dartmouth minuteman, and showed pictures of the old house, at a recent DHAS presentation.



Bob Harding

Farmer Joseph Weaver and nearly a dozen family members still lie nearby, enclosed in a stone wall enclosing a small burial ground abutting a quiet subdivision a few hundred feet from the old farmhouse, Harding noted.







“He was a Revolutionary War veteran... We know where he lived, we know all about his family... And we know a lot about his military service in the American Revolution,” thanks to his military pension application, the lecturer said.

Weaver was born on January 29, 1758 “in Troy, in the County of Bristol and State of Massachusetts, today known as Fall River,” Harding said at the outset of a biographical sketch. “He served at Howland’s Ferry (Little Compton) at age 18, enlisting on June 3, 1776” in the local militia unit.

“Later, he was drafted back for service of two or three months at a time, until September 1778,” the year he married Sarah Bryant and bought “about 50 acres of land with a dwelling house on it” in Dartmouth for \$1,000, according to the deed, Harding said. That same year, Weaver bought another 30 acres of land at Westport Point from a Quaker who was migrating north.

Town records and a newspaper advertisement for some farmland in North Dartmouth confirm that Weaver was living on his future farm near Cedar Dell in 1778. He and his wife would raise six children there; so far, he has been able to track the descendants of the only son, who married a local girl and remained in Dartmouth, Harding reported.

Growing up, “I lived in a house on Alden Avenue, not far from the Weaver House,” Harding said. By the 1960s, the Szala family had purchased the property, running a dairy operation on the open land, he recalled.

Today, the original center chimney of the one and a half story Colonial is now gone, and a small ell was added some years ago, Harding said. In 1798, a newspaper advertisement described it as “one of three handsome farms” for sale in the neighborhood, he noted; an 1858 map shows his son Thomas Weaver occupying the family homestead.

The other ‘handsome’ farms for sale in that ad included the Cedar Dell House and the Philip Cummings House on Old Westport Road, the historian pointed out. On the Weaver farm, families including Soares, Rogers and Roberts lived there and worked the land before the Szalas, he said.

Harding and other historical preservation advocates would like to see the house recognized and protected for posterity. “It clearly qualifies as a significant historical residence... for the sake of getting a plaque” marking its origins, he suggested.

The full story of the house, and the Weaver family, with photos and scans of archival documents, will be going up on the DHAS website ([dartmouthhas.org](http://dartmouthhas.org)) to aid future history researchers, Harding noted.

#### MILITARY SERVICE

Pension records and local militia records make it easy to trace Weaver’s wartime experiences, all with the county militia units serving as a home guard against British incursions. Other local militiamen enlisted in Continental Army regiments, the Continental Navy and Marines, or privateer service in between their local militia assignments.

County records show his first enlistment in June 1776, and first assignment as a guard at Howland’s Ferry, under the command of Captain Daniel Devol. In the spring of 1777, the unit was sent to Fogland Ferry in Little Compton for guard duty; June 1778 found him serving with a coastal patrol detachment covering the shoreline from Dartmouth to the Acushnet River, Harding indicated.

His pension application “said he was quartered at Mishaum, by the shore” on the fateful day that a Royal Navy squadron disembarked thousands of British troops for an attack on Bedford Village, Acushnet and Fairhaven, then all part of Old Dartmouth, Harding added.

“We was marched to the Village of Bedford, when we arrived there it was in the evening, the British had left the place,” Weaver wrote in his application. The militiamen helped tend to the three fatally wounded local men shot by the British, and helped fight the fires started by the raiders, the veteran noted.

For his intermittent service as a militia private during the war, Weaver was granted a pension of \$40 per year, Harding said. It started coming decades after the war had ended, and was paid out until his death a few years later, in 1844.

Weaver’s grave is marked by a simple stone in the family burial ground. DHAS member Jeff King has made several recent visits to the site, helping to clear some of the vines and briars that threaten to consume the small graveyard, Harding reported.

“It’s pretty much grown over, and it’s often hard to see the 11 gravestones there,” Harding said, but the site is on the town’s inventory of historical burial grounds.

His research showed “a neighbor was paid by the town to take care of it in the 1940s, but that’s the last we hear of it in town records,” Harding said of the burial plot.

The nearby Weaver House has been similarly neglected in recent years, though it continues to serve a useful purpose for the university. Hopefully, soon a new historical plaque will grace the old farmhouse, helping to ensure its long family history is not forgotten.

