

Excerpts from **"History of Sterling, MA, Vol. II"**, a local hand typed publication located at the Sterling Public Library. [Transcribed by: CJ Bagley]

Traveling up so-called "Swett "Hill Road, a steep incline which caused early horses and teams no little problem (hence the old and unique name for the road), one passes through a wooded area, once wild uncultivated land, which is now dotted with many modern homes. The road leads into Kendall Hill Road, where early families of that name settled between 1735 and 1742. The first Francis Kendall of Charlestown in 1630's was one of the founders and proprietors of Woburn in 1640. Lieut. Samuel Kendall of the third generation, a noted French and Indian War patriot, owner of many thousands of acres in our present Worcester County area, is said to have done more to populate the county than any of the early settlers. He settled many of his fifteen children in present towns of Athol, New Salem, Leominster, Lancaster and Sterling. He was a builder of the first meeting houses in Lunenburg, (known then as Turkey Hill) and Athol, although in his old age he returned to Woburn to live on early family land. His second, third and fourth sons were given land in Sterling, then a part of Lancaster.

Sons James, Josiah, and Ezekiel came first in that order. They were soon joined by a daughter Elizabeth Kendall who was married to John Brooks of Woburn and Charlestown, who was also a housewright and builder of mills in various parts of the county.

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THE SHANKEL – RITTENHOUSE HOME was the original site of Ezekiel Kendall's home. Whether the rear ell of the house is a part of the original homestead is not known, but many additions and changes to this present house have taken place over the years by such owners as Luke Sawyer, Ebenezer Butterick of "Pattern fame", and his daughter Miss Mary Ellen Butterick, a generous patron of Sterling, who contribute money, land and portraits to the town which are still enjoyed by residents today. Ezekiel was the last of the three Sterling Kendalls to settle on the southerly side of Kendall Hill about 1742.

The present RAY G. SMILEY HOUSE was the site of Josiah Kendall Jr.'s homestead, as we know it today. The original part of this house was the old ell, in which his Aunt Elizabeth Brooks and her husband lived. The main building was added some time during the losing years of or shortly after the Revolutionary War. Josiah Kendall, Sr. helped his son to settle on the property which was originally a part of his homestead farm, which included most of the original "Charlestown Grant" which Josiah Sr. had purchased from the heirs of Norton and Davison.
[Sterling Mine]

Josiah Jr. was a Revolutionary War patriot, the proprietor of an early Inn or Tavern in the center of Sterling, and was an industrious, hard working husbandman and tiller of the soil. His homestead had many interesting features:

1 The interior wooden panels or shutters, which slide across the windows of the old house. They were probably included to protect the family from the cold, as well as to shield the interior rooms of the house from the gaze of curious Indians who were still to be found in the Washacum lake area.

2 A curious "secret room" built behind a first floor hallway closet, being a part of the main central chimney. This tiny room is made of bricks and has a small fireplace attached to the main chimney. It has a large beam overhead about 6' high; and a place where a person where a person may climb up the wall and stand on the overhead beam. A curved resting place with a sort of arm rest was planned in order that the climber could relax un-noticed for long periods of time, if necessary. It is understood that the climber could get up in the attic via this almost un-noticeable passage way. Whether the secret room was intended as a smoke house or a hidden room if attacked by Indians, or even a hiding place for known "Loyalists" is not noted in any records discovered to date. A number of Sterling's early homes have secret storage places near the central chimney and even tunnels between house and barn or other buildings nearby.

3 The second floor of the house on the northwest corner has a fairly large room once used as a "ballroom" for social events and entertaining. When the stenciling was added to the walls of this room is not known. Some of the woodwork in this room was treated with a smoke varnish and paint finish to imitate grained wood, as was prevalent about this time. Some of the furniture was treated in like manner.

Mr. and Mrs. Smiley have found many evidences of Indians on their property, including "boiling stones", stones hollowed out for grinding corn, many small arrows and of course the Chistolite stones having many small crosses in them, caused by impurities imbedded in the stones centuries ago. From a nearby vantage point the two lakes [East and West Washacum] may be seen to good advantage, and it is thought the Indians used the higher rock formations as lookout posts and for sending smoke signals in earlier days.

The next large house on the left belonged to descendants of Josiah Kendall Sr. It is now owned by Mrs. Cora Jacobs. The original salt-box type homestead of Josiah Kendall has long since disappeared. It occupied land across the street from the present house.

In this near area are found several other homes of descendants of Josiah Kendall, including a low, rather small farmhouse, and the later Mansard roofed house belonging to the late Mr. Norman Kendall and his father.

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Branching off on Chamberlain Road, many new houses are noted but on the right hand side of the road can be seen the entrance to the Austin H Philbin house, which is the third house built on the same site originally settled by James Kendall, the eldest of the three brothers to first settle Kendall Hill, about 1735. The original deed from Lieut. Samuel to his son James was located in Worcester County Registry of Deeds.

The Philbin Apple orchards are well known in Sterling as are the Norman Sawyer trees in the same general area, near the corner of Maple Street and Kendall Hill Rd.

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