

IRON WORK FARM in ACTON, Inc.

P.O. Box 1111, Acton, MA 01720

Spring Newsletter

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Patriots Day Open Houses: Jones Tavern and Faulkner House (Monday, April 15, 1-5 p.m.)

The open-house season for 2001 begins on Patriot's Day, Monday, April 15, when the Jones Tavern, 128 Main Street and Faulkner Homestead, 5 High Street, are open for the afternoon.

If you want to get into the spirit of the holiday early, stop by shortly before 6 p.m. on *Sunday*, April 14 to see the "alarm rider" (who we now know was Samuel Prescott of Concord) ride his horse past the tavern to the Faulkner House. When he arrives at the house, the Acton Minutemen will fire their muskets.

This annual enactment is based on the events that took place here on April 19, 1775. Early that morning, the rider galloped from Lexington to Acton, where he warned three of the Acton commanders that British Regulars were approaching Concord. Capt. Francis Faulkner, commander of Acton's reorganized West Militia, fired his musket three times to summon his men, and it was on the lawn of the Faulkner House that the militiamen from west and south Acton gathered before marching to Concord.

The "Iron Work Farm:" the origin of South Acton

--by Anne Forbes

We get many questions about the name of our organization, the Iron Work Farm in Acton, Inc. The name was chosen by the founders in 1964 to evoke the origins of South Acton and its oldest properties. Most of what we know as South Acton was originally part of a 1000-acre grant of 1654 from the General Court of Massachusetts to Major Simon Willard of Concord. The land in today's Acton extended west along the Maynard line from where Parker Street is now to Stow Street, and north to the vicinity of Routes 2 and 111. Maj. Willard had received other properties to reward him for his role in establishing the town of Concord, and a few years later he sold the property to a group of investors for the Concord Iron Works Company.

The Concord Iron Works was an early enterprise formed to extract iron ore from the soil. A forge was built on the Assabet River in what is now West Concord by the son of the iron master at the Lynn (Saugus) Iron Works, and wood was cut from the surrounding woods and wetlands to make charcoal for its furnaces. Part of that surrounding land, which came to be known as the Iron Work Farm, was apparently leased to farmers or worked as a plantation for the benefit of the company.

It is not known how successful the Iron Works ever was. The first investors sold their shares over the years, until by 1675 the whole company was owned by two people--Simon Linde, one of the wealthiest merchants in Boston, and Thomas Brattle, then Treasurer of the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Both men died in the 1680s, and the company went into a steep decline under the ownership of their sons-in-law. Thomas Brattle's half-interest fell into the hands of Peter Bulkeley of Concord and James Russell of Charlestown. In 1688 Mr. Russell described the state into which the iron works had fallen: "(the) workes are now Altogether out of repair and not worth mending, there being no mine near, so they are considerably fallen in vallew. . .," and again in 1698, stating that the works were "long since wholly ruined and the housing all gone to decay."

By 1700, James Russell owned the entire Iron Works, and with it the thousand-acre Iron Work Farm. He divided the land, and began selling it off, mostly in parcels of a hundred acres. The purchasers were mainly people who were later associated with the development of Acton and its separation from Concord. George Robbins bought a hundred-acre piece, on which the "Liberty Tree" House at 24 Liberty Street was later built. Other purchasers were John Brooks, whose land was in the area of Piper Road, John Barker, Samuel Prescott, Daniel Shepard, and members of the Fletcher family.