

## **PREFACE**

**This book covers some 100-plus years of Plymouth railroad history. It is not our intention that this be an exhaustive work because such a document would take years and years to research and finish.**

**However, we have spoken with a good number of people, consulted the local Plymouth Historical Society, and searched newspaper archives. Also, we have visited numerous libraries, and spoke with not a few railroad fans - deriving our information and pictures from many sources.**

**After having read the document, perhaps our readers will have a better concept of early railroad history and the heavy impact it had upon our area.**

**We sincerely hope the book will bring a clearer understanding of how the local Plymouth Regional Senior Center came into being and why it is achieved such signal usefulness in our society today.**

**Special thanks to the many, many kind souls who have helped. Pages could not name you all.**

**By the author**

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## Chapter 1

### THE DAVID WEBSTER TAVERN and the B&M DEPOT BUILDING

Town historians tell us that one of Plymouth's first settlers was Mr. David Webster, coming up from the town of Chester in southern New Hampshire about 1763. Driving his ox team along the old Indian trail and bridal path, his load consisted of household furniture and survival supplies. Passing through an almost trackless forest, he finally reached his destination several weeks later - the Plymouth vicinity.

Several months earlier, he and seven other men from Hollis had come north on a scouting mission, searching for a site where they might make a new settlement. After several weeks of looking, they mutually decided on the present Plymouth location. Thus, in coming north with his oxen and furniture, David Webster was not totally unfamiliar with the region or the route he took, for he had been that way only a few months earlier.

Born in 1738 at the town of Chester, NH, near Hollis, his father was Stephen Webster - a schoolteacher, town leader, something of an accountant and keeper of public books. Probably he came up to Plymouth in the late 1760's after David Webster had arrived, got settled, and completed his first log cabin.

Stephen Webster's brother Uncle Abel Webster also later came up to Plymouth from Hollis, building his house and barns on Smith Road, not far from Tenney Mountain Highway, and in the Smith Covered Bridge vicinity.

Davis Webster's two brothers William and Amos also came up to Plymouth. Thus their coming was in some ways similar to the days of America's westward movement in the later mid-1800, when very often the whole family went together.

**When David Webster came to Plymouth, it is said he was six feet tall, of sturdy build, and had become married to Elizabeth Clough, daughter of his stepmother, presumably from the town of Hollis, We found interesting census information on the population of Plymouth in the early and later years. By 1773, there were 345 citizens - 57 families and 200 children under 16 years of age. Many of these had also come from the Hollis area.**

**By 1790 there were 625 citizens, by 1850 there were 1296, and finally by 1900, the town had a total population of nearly 2000 people.**

**In the year 1771, distinguished Gov. Wentworth along with his large entourage of some 60 persons including councilors and servants, came through Plymouth on their way to Dartmouth College graduation.**

**They stopped overnight at the Webster Tavern, special guests of innkeeper David Webster. Most folks felt that David Webster was indeed perhaps the most influential of all the Plymouth pioneers. Thus the governor's stopover at his hotel would have brought him even more status.**

**Members of the governor's large party stayed overnight at other distinguished residences in the village that night - making their honored visit one of the most-talked-about events in Plymouth for a good many years.**

**By 1777, it is reported that David Webster had two slaves, named Cisco and Dinah, possibly man and wife. Some accounts say he eventually had four slaves, which perhaps would have been needed in their large hotel-tavern business. This was long before the Abraham Lincoln era, and some seventy-five years before the slavery issue surfaced, leading to the Civil War of 1862-1865.**

**Actually these slaves were considered part of the Webster family, we learn, and obviously functioned as "servant-workers" in the Webster Tavern establishment.**

Even back in England during those times, slaves were accepted, the practice was legal, and furthermore, slavery was considered needful.

Records say Cisco and Dinah, on their demise, were tenderly buried in the Webster family plot at Trinity Cemetery in Holderness.

Historical records affirm that David Webster not only helped establish the town of Plymouth, but over the years he helped carve out a living there, raised his brood, early resolved to “tame the wilderness,” and became famous in the process.

Early town business affairs were generally conducted at the Webster residence, including regular Town Meetings and for a time, his home served as a church.

Accordingly, his place of business gradually became a local social center, also offering comfortable overnight accommodations for travelers. In keeping with the times, David Webster served “spirits” to supplement his income and thus from the very beginning, their home became known as “Webster’s Tavern.”

Soon he was forced to enlarge his building to accommodate the increasing flow of travelers passing through the area. It is said he personally maintained this public business until the year 1800, at which point in time his son William took it over.

In 1842, William built a new, larger building on the premises, with gambrel roof, kerosene lights, a second floor, six chimneys, and increased space for overnight accommodations. Thereafter it became known as a popular hotel for traveling judges and court officials and sometime in those years was re-named the “Pemigewassett Hotel.” This enterprise continued until the year 1862, when it was completely destroyed by fire.

**David Webster and his family had no way of knowing that their chosen home site would someday become such a significant location in Plymouth's history. Perhaps he had felt a special source of energy there, possible stronger than he had sensed in other places. Possibly that is why he decided to locate his cabin at that exact location, and very possibly said to his wife. "Eureka, my dear, this is it, we have found it!" Looking back we see his choice was indeed a good one.**

**His family had not the faintest idea that their land would someday become the site of a busy four-story hotel and bustling railroad station. Finally, they had not the least clue that on this very same property, many, many years later, would be located the popular and busy Plymouth Regional Senior Center.**

**In our mind's eye, as we look toward the heavens, we can see the Webster family sitting up there on a cloud, dangling their feet, smiling as they look down upon us, all clapping their hands in glee, with well-deserved pride.**

**Several weeks or months after David Webster arrived in Plymouth, his wife also began threading her way northward from Hollis, by horseback - she and her newborn son. Alone in the vast, desolate, and howling wilderness they came - except for the ever-present roving Indians. One reference indicated that being heavy with child, Mrs. Webster had in good judgement chosen to stay behind in Hollis until her son David Jr. was born. There she would have had access to familiar midwives who would assist in her delivery. Such would account for her late arrival.**

**We surmise that Mrs. Elizabeth Webster must have been a determined and focused female - above all else, the "survivor-type." Pushing north, with every fiber of her being, she resolved in her heart to reach the Plymouth area, and once more be joyously reunited with her husband and friends. Upon her joyous arrival, we can hear her proud husband say, "I knew she could do it!"**

**We read that her final night of her trip was spent just five miles south of Plymouth, in a cave located in the present town of Bridgewater. She had tethered her horse down by the river and water, some distance away. Hardly had gotten settled when she heard screams and cries of a wild sounding Indian “pow-wow” up above on top of a cliff. No sleep for Mrs. Webster that night!**

**A very brave lady she surely was and how so very interesting would have been more details of her trip. All praise to she who we now proudly assign the title, “First Lady of Plymouth!”**

**Mr. David Webster, being a multi-talented leader of men, immediately headed up committees to erect bridges, build roads, and construct mills. Also he became a strong influence for good in helping establish strong local government. In addition, he wisely encouraged the building of several one-room schools throughout the district. And finally, for an extended number of years he served as Superintendent of the local Church Sunday School. Obviously he was an “all-around man of men.”**

**It was on December 12, 1774, that Paul Revere rode his horse from Boston to Portsmouth, warning the patriots they must seize the gunpowder from Fort William and Mary, stashed on an island in the Portsmouth harbor. Two days later colonists captured the fort, took the huge supply of British gunpowder to Durham, and hid it under the church pulpit. Later it was delivered to the proper locations in readiness for British attack.**

**Upon hearing imminent war news, David Webster joined up as a scout for Rogers Rangers. Eventually he became a Sergeant in the 11th NH Regiment, and later served as Captain under Major John Stark. During the 1777 Battle of Saratoga, all 11th NH troops were said to be under his immediate command. Thus, it was no surprise that he soon received the rank of full Colonel.**

Such promotions would have been awarded him upon the personal request of Major John Stark and confirmed by General George Washington himself. That's our man!

Despite his conspicuous military successes, David Webster also had his sadnesses. His younger brother Amos became a casualty while fighting in the Battle of Saratoga. For his parents this only left two sons.

Nerves were extremely tense throughout the upper N.H. and Vermont region during those uncertain months. Serious fear of immanent attack from the large contingents of British soldiers stationed in nearby Canada made the helpless and unarmed colonists very fearful.

In 1780 a large group of Indians led by the French and a British Tory attacked the town of Royalton, Vermont, located just south-west of Barre. 20 homes were burned, many barns destroyed, two men murdered, 25 persons taken captive, and a great slaughter was made of cows, sheep, swine, and oxen. Actually the whole town was literally destroyed.

In fact, it is said all was flames and carnage in the area for days. Consequently, frightful rumors terrorized other towns throughout all of northern New Hampshire and Vermont. With many able men away at war, citizens felt totally defenseless.

The object of the attack on Royalton was a search for high level American officers said to be in the area. Original plans were the burning of the town of Newbury, Vermont, and also Hanover, New Hampshire. Thankfully, these villages were saved.

Ten men from Plymouth were said to have been quartered with General Washington at Valley Forge during that frightful winter. All suffered extreme cold and exposure, as well as a lack of food, foot ware, heavy clothes and medicine.

Also small pox epidemics raged fiercely through the camps, taking their tolls. Men had to make their own huts, and when marching, they were not provided with tents for cover.

**Congress was most dilatory in answering General Washington's urgent pleas for all the above essentials of war.**

**When the revolution was finally over, it took David Webster eight days to ride his horse back to Plymouth. No trains back then! How happy his family and townspeople must have been to see him and the others reach home safely, at last!**

**Major John Stark said that Mr. David Webster had performed his military duties well, in an able and exemplary manner. That made all proud. But how sad the family must have been to learn his brother Amos had become a casualty, buried far away in a lonely, perhaps unmarked grave, many miles from home.**

**In his later years, David Webster served several terms as High Sheriff of Grafton County. This would have put him in touch with such local and prominent men as Col. William Tarleton, long-time hotelkeeper and also himself Sheriff of Grafton County for many years.**

**After a long and useful life, David Webster became deceased in 1824 at the age of 86 and was buried with due honors in the nearby Holderness Trinity Cemetery. reports tell us a great host attended his last rites and the final words of the clergy were:**

**“His bones are dust,  
His sword is rust,  
His soul is with,  
The saints we trust.”**

**But now, we must tell our readers “the rest of the David Webster story.” His great-great grandson, Captain Harl Pease Jr., became New Hampshire's most conspicuous military casualty in World War II, having posthumously received the Congressional Medal of Honor from President Roosevelt. And finally, in 1957, Pease Air Force Base at Portsmouth, N. H., was named in his honor, home of the Atom Bomb group for a time.**

**Thus we might safely say that “military honors” carried on down through the family from Major David Webster to Captain Harl Pease, Jr.**

**After the Webster Pemigewasset House property was destroyed by fire in 1862, the land was soon thereafter purchased by the Boston and Concord Railroad. They immediately constructed a second Pemigewasset Hotel on the same location in 1863, elegant as well as immense - a four-story building, including two large wings, with reportedly 600 guest rooms. This building also included the new railroad depot down in back, on the railroad track level.**

**The main entrance to this huge structure was located approximately where the Submarine Sandwich Shop stands today - on the level with South Main Street. Some said it was far down the tracks, but the Plymouth Historical Society reports having pictures taken from the common with the big Pemigewasset Hotel in the immediate foreground. And old town maps show the hotel to be at the very bottom of Highland Street hill, just down past the current Anderson Bakery location.**

**Rooms at the new hotel were spacious and elaborate; expansive verandas existed on both sides, and a wide, beautiful stairway led up to the main, fine dining hall. Down on the lowest level and adjacent to the tracks, was located a less expensive, restaurant, designed for train passengers. Engines traveling both north and south stopped regularly at the Pemigewasset Hotel for noontime meals, so that passengers might be allowed to spend their money and enjoy sumptuous cuisine. Also all trains stopped regularly at 5 P.M. each day, for the great evening rush hour.**

**The railroad owned the hotel so large crowds dining and staying there helped fill the railroad’s coffers and swell their profits. While the trains were stopped, their boilers were filled with water and the tenders of the wood burning engines were filled with cordwood.**