

Compliments of Albert Holmes
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FRIDAY, JANUARY 28, 1910. SOMERVILLE JOURNAL:

ABOUT MENOTOMY RIVER.

J. Albert Holmes Gives Facts in Regard to the Ancient Name and the History of the Stream Now Known as Alewife Brook.

In view of the general interest regarding the proposition entertained by the Somerville Historical society, which has joined with the Medford, Cambridge, and Arlington societies in a movement asking the park commissioners to change the name of Alewife brook to Menotomy river, the following history of the ancient name "Menotomy" and the river of that name has been prepared by J. Albert Holmes, of the Somerville Historical society, who has been appointed to act with the neighboring societies in reference to the change:—

In the following account

General court refers to the general court of the colony of Massachusetts bay.

Town records, town and selectmen's records of Newtowne and Cambridge, 1630-1703.

Proprietors' records, proprietors' records of the town of Cambridge, 1635-1829.

Commissioners' records, the third report of the record commissioners of Boston, Charlestown land records, 1635-1803.

Cutter, B. and W. R. Cutter's "History of Arlington," 1886.

Paige, Lucius R. Paige's "History of Cambridge," 1877.

Wyman, T. B. Wyman's "Charlestown Genealogies and Estates," 1629-1818.

The Indians early taught the settlers of Massachusetts Bay colony to "fish" their corn, pumpkins, squash, and beans; that is, to place a fish in the ground with the seed. So plentiful were fish in the waters of the colony that they actually overflowed the banks of the smaller rivers and streams, as they crowded through the narrow portions in their haste to reach the spawning grounds.

The taking of land fish, that is, fish taken without the aid of boats, was from the first controlled by the general court, as "The Ware att Mistick, granted to Gov. Winthrop and Mathew Cradocke of London," March 4, 1633-'34, and "Att a Genrall Court holden att Newe Towne, Sept. 3, 1634." "There is leave granted to the inhabitants of Newe Towne to bulde a weire vpon any place of Winotimes Ryver, within their owne bounds." The business was further controlled, when in the general court "It was ordered that all weers shall be set open from the last day of the weeke at noon till the second day in the morning" (Saturday noon till Monday morning), June 6, 1639.

The weir granted to Winthrop and Cradocke in 1634 was at the outlet of Mystic lake, where High street, Medford, crosses Mystic river at what is known as Weir bridge. Cutter says: "The Mystic river, of which the ancient Menotomy river is a branch, has its source in Mystic pond, which was shown on Wood's map of Massachusetts, 1633."

The names of Mystic and Menotomy rivers are apparently aboriginal designations, and, like all Indian names, probably describe the locality to which they were affixed. Trumbull gives the origin of the name Mystic anciently written Mistick, as applied to the Med-

weir which led from Menotomy road, and was possibly Tannery street; also that the bridge over the river was called Menotomy bridge, and that there was a gate at that point; that the weir and the right to take fish thereat, also a half-acre of land and the cartway leading thereto, were leased to various residents of the town from time to time, and that one of the designations for the lands between Massachusetts avenue and the Somerville line east of Menotomy river was "Weir Field."

There is a plan in the city engineer's office, Cambridge, bearing date of 1862, and on which is shown a foot bridge crossing the river about 740 feet northerly or down stream from Massachusetts avenue. Just below this bridge appears on the plan the word "fisheries." It would appear that here was located the ancient fish weir, where shad and alewives were taken by the early inhabitants for "fishing their Indian corn." The foot bridge was just at the point where the high land draws close to the river on either side, forming the outfall of the basin in which lie Fresh and Spy ponds and the Fresh pond meadows. It would be the natural place to locate a weir, for above the "great swamp" spread out on either side, while a short distance below the river was crossed by the Charlestown line, beyond which the weir could not be located, according to the grant.

There was another weir at the outlet of Spy pond, and without doubt fish were taken at many other points along the river within the then boundaries of Cambridge. A resident of Cambridge informs me that he very well remembers a fish house which stood over the brook just north of Concord avenue, where the fish were taken as they passed through a plank flume.

The line between Newe Towne and Charlestown was established March 6, 1632-'33, and with one or two exceptions is the same as that which now separates Cambridge from Somerville. At Menotomy river the line probably remains as near its original location as it was possible to retain it during 275 years.

The general court agreed March 3, 1635-'36, that "Newe Towne bounds shall run eight myles into the country from their meeting house."

This grant, among other lands, included a part of the present Arlington; the line between Newtowne and Charlestown was extended nearly straight back into the country. The district north of this line, from the line to Mystic river, and from Menotomy river westward to near Alewife Meadow brook, was known as Line field.

There is among the records of the Middlesex county court a plan of the ancient Line field, on which is shown the line from which the land takes its name, and parallel with it a road, designated in the commissioners' records as the "Bridgeway." In the Charlestown

with certain inhabitants of Charlestown, were incorporated into a district June 9, 1762, and Cutter tells us that the district was generally called Menotomy, since it included all the territory in the two towns on the westerly side of Menotomy river.

Cambridge Second Parish was incorporated February 27, 1807, under the name of West Cambridge, to which was annexed, February 25, 1842, that part of Charlestown west of Menotomy river called "Line Field." The name was changed to Arlington April 13, 1867.

Russell Cook, a lifelong resident of the neighborhood next Menotomy river, states that alewives were so plentiful in the river during the spawning season that "one could walk across on them." The great abundance of alewives taken from the river during the first 100 years of settlement very naturally led to its being referred to as the Alewife brook, and so in the commissioners' records we find, under the survey of 1802, the bridge carrying Menotomy road, now Broadway, Somerville, over Menotomy river referred to as the Alewife bridge. The stream was sometimes referred to as "the Little River" and "Little Mystic," as the Mystic river was called the Great river.

Little river has remained as the name of the outlet of Spy pond, which was sometimes called Menotomy pond, while Menotomy river was the outlet of Fresh pond.

In the Cambridge town records, 1630-1703, we find the river called "Menotomie," "Menotomy," "Notomy," and "Winattime"; in the proprietors' records, 1635-1829, it is given "Menotmy," "Manotomie," and "Menotamy"; the commissioners' records, 1638-1802, give "Winotamies" and "Menotomies" river. Paige calls it "Menotomy" river, and Wyman refers to "Menotomy" river no less than forty times between 1637 and 1808, and once to Alewife river, in 1818. Cutter gives "Menotomy" river, and there have been found in the Middlesex registry no less than thirty deeds, between the years 1646 and 1794, in which Menotomy river is mentioned; it was also referred to as Little river, or Menotomy river, in 1763. "Menotomy" is the form of spelling used by far the greater number of times in the above records, and as the records show, Menotomy river was the name by which the beautiful little stream winding its way through the marshes and meadows from Fresh pond to the Mystic was known for nearly 200 years. Its waters were clear and of considerable depth, and at the old weir below Massachusetts avenue it had a width in 1862 of about twenty feet, while above it had a less, and below a greater depth. On May 10, 1775, the committee of safety voted "that Mr. Watson be directed and empowered to remove to Cambridge the boats now in Menotomy river."

The year 1818 seems to have been near the time when Menotomy river began to be called Alewife brook, and doubtless because of the abundance of alewives taken from its waters.

Webster says: "The alewife is a North American fish of the herring family, and the name is properly 'alooft,' the Indian name of a fish. It is also called ellwif, ellwhop, and branch herring." He also says that alewife is a woman who keeps an alehouse. The Century dictionary says: "A particular

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ford river, thus: "Tuk in Indian denotes a river whose waters are driven in waves by the tide or winds. With the adjectival missi, 'great,' it forms missi-tuk, now written Mystic—the name of the 'great river' of Boston bay. The origin of the name Menotomy yet awaits explanation. The spellings of the word have been various."

Newtowne soon took advantage of the privilege granted by the general court, and on March 1, 1635, "Agreed with John Clark to make a sufficient Weir to Catch Alewife vpon Menotomies River in the bounds of this Town before the 12th of Aprill next, and shall sell and deliver unto inhabitants of the Town and no other, except for bayte, all the Aylwifs he shall take at his vi pr thousand." On April 4, 1636, it was ordered by the town "That Walter Nichols shall pull vpp the boarded weire in Menotomis River." Whether this order to pull up the weir was in anticipation of the order of the general court, June 6, 1639, to set open the weirs from Saturday noon till Monday morning, to allow the fish to pass, or for its entire removal, is not plain, but probably the former, for on April 23, 1636, Andrew Warner was "Appointed to see a cartway made to the weire."

In February, 1686, the weir and weir field were let to Nathaniel Patten for thirty shillings for the ensuing year, and in April he was chosen to look after the gate at "Notomie Bridge," for which the rent of the weir was to be allowed him. At a meeting of the proprietors March 25, 1720, it was voted that the privilege of the weirs for catching of fish, with the lands thereto appertaining, belong to said proprietors. Also voted that one acre of the flats of Great Spy pond on the north side of the bridge over Mills's weir be laid out for the better securing said proprietors' privilege of catching of fish in said town. The "bridge" carried Weir lane, or Lake street, Arlington, over the outlet at Spy pond.

Paige tells us that "at an early period the Dickson family occupied an estate on the easterly side of Menotomy river, extending from North avenue (now Massachusetts avenue) to the Winter Hill road" (Broadway, Somerville). On July 24, 1687, pursuant to a vote of the town, the selectmen laid out to John Dickson about one-fourth acre of land "in our ware field next Charlestown line"; the northwest boundary was next the weir field, on which boundary he was to maintain a fence.

At a meeting of the proprietors May 15, 1724, it was voted that John Dickson have the improvement of the half-acre of land at the weirs and the highway leading to it through Weir field this present year for six shillings.

Apparently the half-acre at the weir and the highway leading thereto were never definitely laid out by vote of the proprietors, but were reserved; as when, in 1707, three lots were assigned, "In the Ware field," the lot numbered thirty-six, falling to Amos Merritt, was divided by the highway to the weir. That part of Merritt's lot on the easterly side of the highway was bounded northerly by the half-acre, while the portion on the westerly side bounded northerly on Menotomy river.

Massachusetts avenue in Cambridge, above the common, was in use as a path or road as early as 1635, and perhaps earlier, and was called the "highway to Menotomy."

From the foregoing records we learn that in 1635 a fish weir was established

records, UNDER date of November 13, 1637, appears the following agreement: "That a footway bee made over Wenotomies & a way between the lotts lette 3 pole wide."

As near as can be ascertained, the "footway" crossed Menotomy river where Broadway, Somerville, crosses now, but the "Bridgeway" has entirely disappeared, except a short portion of it northwest of Medford street, Arlington. This ancient plan shows a highway bordering the Arlington shore of Mystic and Menotomy rivers, where 250 years later the Metropolitan park commission laid out a parkway.

The committee appointed to make a survey of Charlestown streets, 1787, and to assert the town's rights where encroachments had been made, reported that "There is a fishing place at Menotomy Bridge, South Side, which appears to belong to the Town, but Mr. Dickson has put up a fence and enclosed the most of it." That the land belonged to the town is no doubt correct, but their right to take fish there was denied by the county court in 1681, as appears in the records of the court: "The selectmen of Cambridge, plaintiffs against Capt. Lawrence Hammond and John Cutler, jun., defendants, do humbly declare as followeth, &c. In the year 1634 the General Court granted them liberty to erect a ware upon Minotomy River, and they accordingly so did, and have had quiet possession of the same from that time until now, without any disturbance of their neighbors of Charlestown or any other; and hath been in a manner the stay and support of the town by fishing their Indian corn, which is the principal part of their husbandry and livelihood. The defendants have both violently and contemptuously proceeded to obstruct the passage of the fish to the wares, which they so long possessed, as above said, to their great damage and loss of two hundred thousand fish, which we judge will be a hundred pounds damage to the town in their crop, and tending to the inevitable impoverishing of divers poor families."

Paige says, writing in 1877: "The practice of fishing their Indian corn" was long ago abandoned by cultivators in Cambridge; but the privilege of taking fish in Menotomy river remains valuable. It has been subject to occasional controversies and litigations since 1681, in all which Cambridge has preserved the rights originally granted; and to the present day 'fish officers' are annually appointed by the city council to take care that those rights suffer no infringement." "Fish officers" are still appointed in Cambridge.

Some arrangement was perhaps made whereby Charlestown might take fish below the Cambridge weir. In 1842, when Somerville was set off from Charlestown, Lorenzo W. Dow, Jesse Simpson, and George W. Hayes were appointed the first "fish officers," and Mr. Dow informs us that alewives were taken in seines in large quantities and sold in Boston for bait. Somerville fishermen were allowed to take fish on certain nights, and those of West Cambridge or Medford on the alternate nights, and it was the duty of the fish officers to see that this law was followed.

The northwesterly part of the town of Cambridge was made a separate precinct December 27, 1732, and was afterwards styled the Second Parish, or more generally Menotomy. The line of division was Menotomy river from Charlestown

use of alewife, probably in allusion to their corpulent appearance; the form 'aloof,' as recorded in 1678, is said to be the Indian name of the fish, but is probably an error for alewife." But, as it is an American fish, the Indians doubtless had a name for it, and "aloof" is correct; the word "alewife" being the nearest in the language of the settlers to the Indian name "aloof," and one with which they were more familiar, came to be used as the name of this fish.

Grandpa Keeler says, in "Cape Cod Folks": "They're very good, teacher, alewhops are—very good—though they're bony as the—they're 'tarnal bony, teacher. They're what we call herrin's in the winter."

"Bachelor Lot, here, was a' asking Captain Sartell what kind o' fish them was that it's recorded in the Scriptures to a' fed the multitude, and then took up so many baskets full o' leavin's; and the captain told him that as to exactly what manner of fish them was he hadn't sufficient acquaintance with the book of Jonah to say, but, as near as he could calk'late, he reconed they was alewhops . . . for it stood to reason that there wa'n't no other fish but an alewhop that they could feed five thousand folks out of seven little ones and then take up twelve bushel baskets full of bones." J. Albert Holmes.

MENOTOMY VS. ALEWIFE.

The Somerville Journal presents in this issue through the courtesy of J. Albert Holmes, of the Somerville Historical society, a history of Alewife brook, or Menotomy river, as it was called in ancient days. The Historical society favors changing the name back to Menotomy river, and the proposition is opposed by some who believe Alewife to be the more characteristic name as well as of importance legally, since the name appears on many deeds and court records.

The article is not an argument, but merely a history, and is a valuable contribution to the historical literature of Somerville. Whatever may be the reader's attitude regarding the change of name the article cannot fail to be of interest.

Pittsburg Post.

OLD HABITS STRONG.

"But why do you put your friend's things in the dining-room?"

"Oh, he is so used to restaurants that he won't enjoy his dinner unless he can watch his hat and coat."—Louisville Courier-Journal.

INCOMPLETE INFORMATION.

"We are now exactly a thousand feet above the level of the sea."

"What sea?"

"The guide book doesn't say."—Bon Vivant.

CAUGHT WITH SUGAR.

Examining Magistrate—"Madam, you persistently deny that you committed this act, though the description of the culprit fits you exactly—beautiful face and figure, extremely youthful appearance, most attractive."