

Some Wings of Old Dartmouth

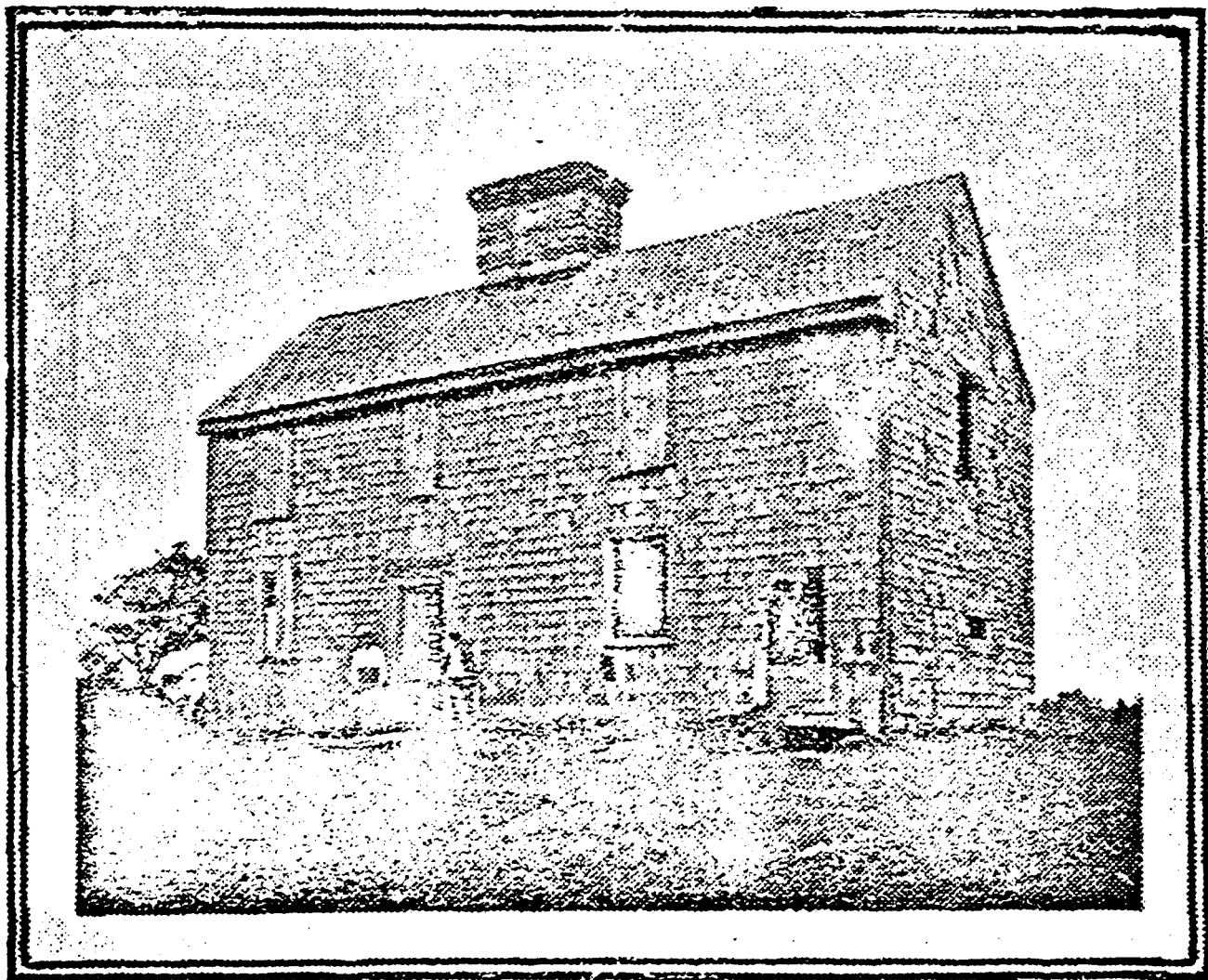
AND

Their Homes

BY

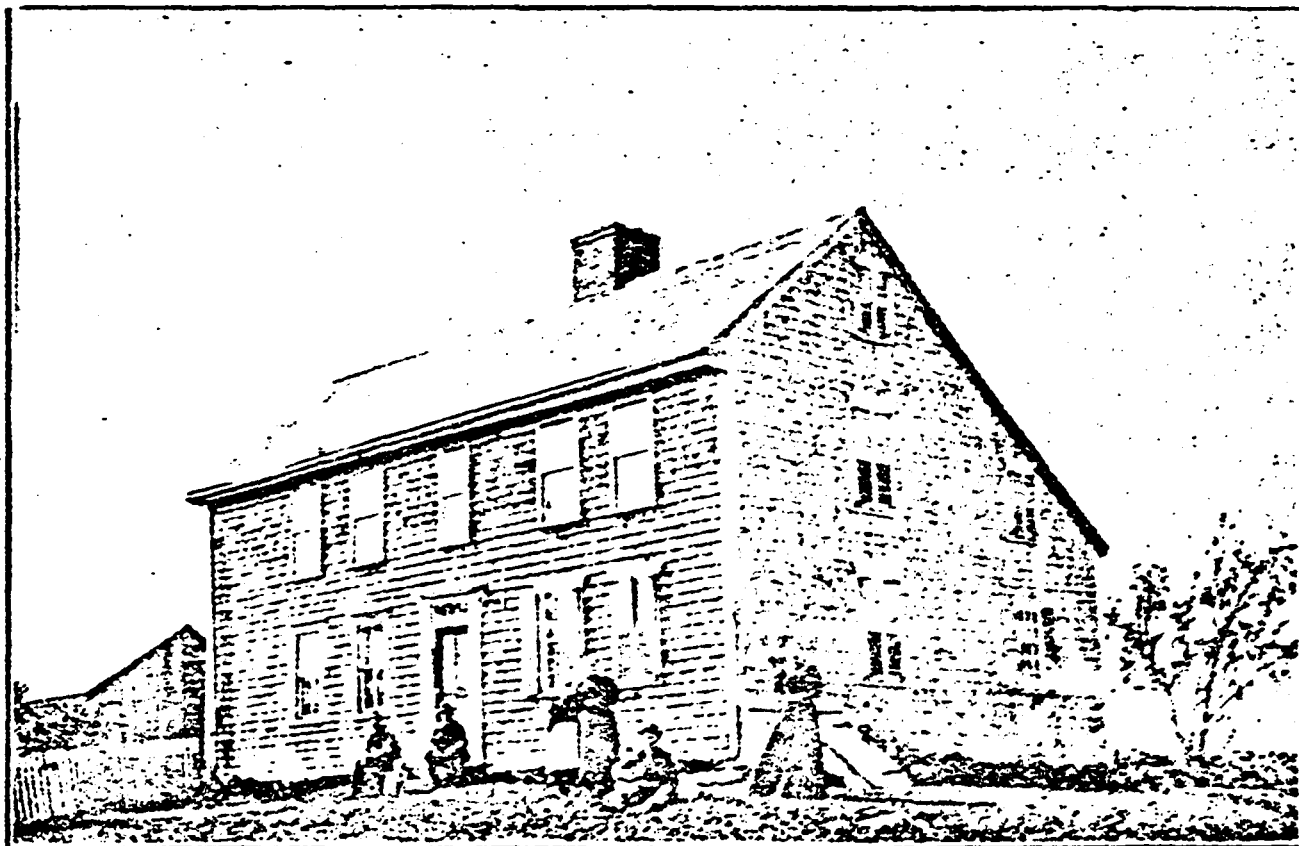
William Arthur Wing

Written for the Wing Family Reunion  
at Sandwich, Mass.,  
1905.



THE RICKETSON-WING HOUSE  
1684





HOME OF MATTHEW WING  
1797



# Some Wings of Old Dartmouth

And

## Their Homes

By

William Arthur Wing

"In ye town of Dartmouth on ye 25th day of ye 2nd month (called April), 1704, a meeting was appointed on purpose at ye house of Matthew Wing." So reads the worn marriage certificate signed by Matthew Wing and others—for the "purpose" was the marriage of his step-daughter, Rebecca Ricketson, to John Russell—"their being no thing to hinder and their intentions being duly apublished."

This "house of Matthew Wing," built about 10 years after King Philip's war—when, as Increase Mather wrote, "Dartmouth did they burn with fire and barbarously murder both men and women"—stands on the east side of "Acoxet" or Westport river. It is

"Now fallen to decay,  
With weather-stains upon the wall  
And stairway worn and crazy doors,  
And creaking and uneven floors  
And chimney huge and tall."

Facing south on the upland, it commands a fine sweep of river, bay and good old New England country. The sunset softens the time-worn shingles and the crumbling stone of the massive chimney, with its crude pilasters. Within, in spite of its pathetic desolation, the brave old beams and fine woodwork bespeak an early New England craftsman at his best.

The wedding room, with attractive corner buffet and great fireplace, in the simplicity of its appointments, was in accord with the assembled Friends, and if the sun streamed through the many-paned windows on that spring day—200 years ago—it must have been a rare, quaint picture.

Up winding stairs, in the great chamber above, was a chimney-piece (now in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society in New Bedford, Mass.) called by experts one of the finest of its time extant in Massachusetts.

Clambering up to the loft to watch the last rays of the setting sun upon the hills, the river and the far-off islands, you feel your ancestor, William Ricketson, builded well.

Elizabeth Mott Ricketson, his widow, came from Portsmouth, R. I., where her parents were well known Friends. Her grandparents, first comers of the Motts, had been members, in Roxbury, of the church of John Eliot, the apostle to the Indians.

In 1694, Mistress Elizabeth Ricketson was one of the two women named in the confirmatory deed to the Proprietor of Dartmouth. Not long after that she was married to Matthew Wing of Sandwich, whose home was the so called "old fort house" built about 1645, and now owned by Alvin Wing, being one of the oldest homes in New England still in possession of descendants. Matthew's parents, Stephen and Sarah (Briggs) Wing, were members of the first Society of Friends in America. In 1700, in his will, Stephen Wing asked to be laid in "our friends Burying place at Spring Hill," but a short distance from his doorstep.

His son, Matthew Wing, received his first mention in the Dartmouth town-meeting records in 1700, when chosen one of two grand jury men for the superior court at Bristol, then Dartmouth's county seat. It is interesting to find that he held several quaint offices, such as "receiver of black birds" (those who killed them to receive a penny apiece), and also "fence viewer." When the eldest Ricketson son married, a few years after his sister Rebecca, Matthew Wing bought the house and 100 acres at "Shinsuet," just north of the Ricketson homestead.

This house was a great two-storied double one, of the lean-to type, and faced south—as well-behaved colonial houses should. Family tradition says that it was begun by one Landers of Sandwich, and left unfinished so when Matthew Wing bought it, the floor timbers had sprouted and small trees were growing up toward the second story. In the stone wall, near the front of the house, is a large flat stone serving as a stile. In it is a deeply cut B. W.—1711, none other than young Benjamin Wing, who, with Joseph, were his only sons. It is this house which Benjamin Crane, the Old Dartmouth surveyor, means when, in his quaint journal, about 1720, he writes, “stayed one night at Matthew Wing’s.”

Like most in Old Dartmouth, with its many Friends, Matthew Wing seems to have lived the simple life.

The Indian troubles were now fire-side tales. The greatest excitements were those of town-meetings, when the Friends and their affiliates made determined and repeated opposition against War, Slavery and “hireling ministers.”

A glimpse within this old house may be seen by selections from its master’s inventory in 1724: “My Bible, 19 chairs, a round table and another table, one grate table and 17 napkins, 12 pewter plates, 10 platters, 4 porringers, one tankard, 13 silver spoons, knives and forks, a case of bottles and other glasses, hand-irons, a warming pan and a looking glass, three chests, a case of drawers, 5 feather beds with furniture well compleated, 7 pairs of Good New linen sheets, 12 pares other sheats, a cradle and a spinning wheel.”

This old house was torn down some years ago. Just in the rear is the old family burying-ground, where, as from the house, are beautiful views. Here, when the near-by orchard is in full bloom, the wind from the river below sometimes scatters the petals over the graves of Elizabeth and Matthew Wing.

Joseph Wing, their eldest son, in his father’s will was given the house and

land where he dwelt. This was upon the hill across the road from the great lean-to home of Matthew Wing, and its site is now occupied by the Major Allen house. No picture exists of this home, but an aged descendant remembers its great stone chimney, and its being the “only house he ever saw with diamond-paned windows.”

Joseph’s wife was Catharine—but who I do not know. Some facts point to her being from Sandwich; so perhaps Joseph went back to the home of his fathers for a wife.

He was awarded £10 for his “extraordinary service of collecting the Province, County and Town taxes.” If Joseph Wing made £10 in town affairs, one John Wing of Dartmouth did not, for in 1748 he promised to serve as selectman, assessor and overseer of the poor without any charge. He was chosen moderator and also tithing-man.

John Wing, the son of Joseph and Catharine (——) Wing, died when a young man. His widow, who was Jemima Shepherd of Dartmouth, was a daughter of Dorcas Wing, a daughter of Daniel Wing, Jr., of Sandwich, whose home still stands, up by the “ponds,” and remains in possession of the Wings. This same Jemima, daughter, wife and widow of Wings, proved her winsomeness three times, and moved out near Wings station, “up York state,” where many of the kindred dwelt.

Her eldest son John remained in Dartmouth with his grandparents, Catharine and Joseph Wing, at their homestead with the diamond-paned windows, and it was this homestead farm that was bequeathed him by his grandfather about 1778 in a will, where he styles himself Joseph Wing, gentleman.

Young John Wing began his manhood with unusually bright prospects for those days. His marriage to Mercy Almy, a woman of beloved memory, was a fine union. Her house at Quanset, the old Almy estate, some miles down the road from his home, at the mouth of Buzzards bay, was a place of glorious sea views. The first



settler of the Almy name at Quanset, nearly 200 years ago, was her grandfather, Job Almy, who inherited the place from his father, William Almy of Punkatest, near Tiverton, R. I., son of Governor Christopher Almy of Portsmouth, R. I., who served his colony well during the troublous Andros times.

As Job Almy's worldly wealth increased he built him "more stately mansions," three in all, each with a "house with a gambrel roof," not unlike the birthplace of Holmes in Cambridge, who explains gambrel thus:

"Let me beg  
You'll look at a horse's hinder leg—  
First great angle above the hoof—  
That's the gambrel—hence gambrel roof."

Finally, upon Job Almy's wife Lydia's inheritance from her wealthy father, he quite outdid himself by building the finest gambrel roof house in all Dartmouth, which remains today in possession of the Almy family. Even this was no compensation for his wife's home in Newport, opposite the Old Stone Mill, which was not built by the Norsemen, but for her great uncle, Governor Benedict Arnold.

Mercy Almy, the granddaughter of Job and Lydia, exchanged by marriage her gambrel-roofed home for one as fine—the Dutch Cap, so called from the shape of its roof; and so we are following the memories of these old-time Wings of Dartmouth through a varied architectural ramble. From the fine old Ricketson house of the Rhode Island type, to Matthew Wing's great lean-to house, to the hill-top home with its diamond-paned windows, on to the Almy gambrels, and then to the square-roofed Dutch Cap. This house, "Built in the old Colonial day,

"When men lived in a grander way—  
With ampler hospitality,"

stands at the top of a high hill overlooking Buzzards bay, the Hope of Gosnold, across to Cuttyhunk, once called Slocums Isle, where sojourned that intrepid adventurer Bartholomew Gosnold in 1602. Indeed the lofty elm, of eight feet girth, in front of

this Old Dutch Cap, can be seen from Cuttyhunk (Slocums Isle), some 16 miles across the bay. Family lore says that a Holder Slocum, though probably Giles, built this house for his son—like his own home—about a mile farther northward. Only, having vowed never to build so large a house again, he made this one a foot smaller each way, so that it measured about 40 by 30 feet.

In the olden time this must have been an ideal home, with its great square rooms with fair prospects from each of the many small, paned windows. The beautiful panelled chimney-pieces and the carved balustrades of the winding staircases are reminders of the days when

"Builders wrought with greatest care."

Remarkable tales are told of the number of shingles needed to cover the great roof, and especially of the number of barrels of cider in the cellar; for the two have some connection, most assuredly. Great was the hospitality on Slocums Neck when John and Mercy Almy lived there in the old Dutch Cap house.

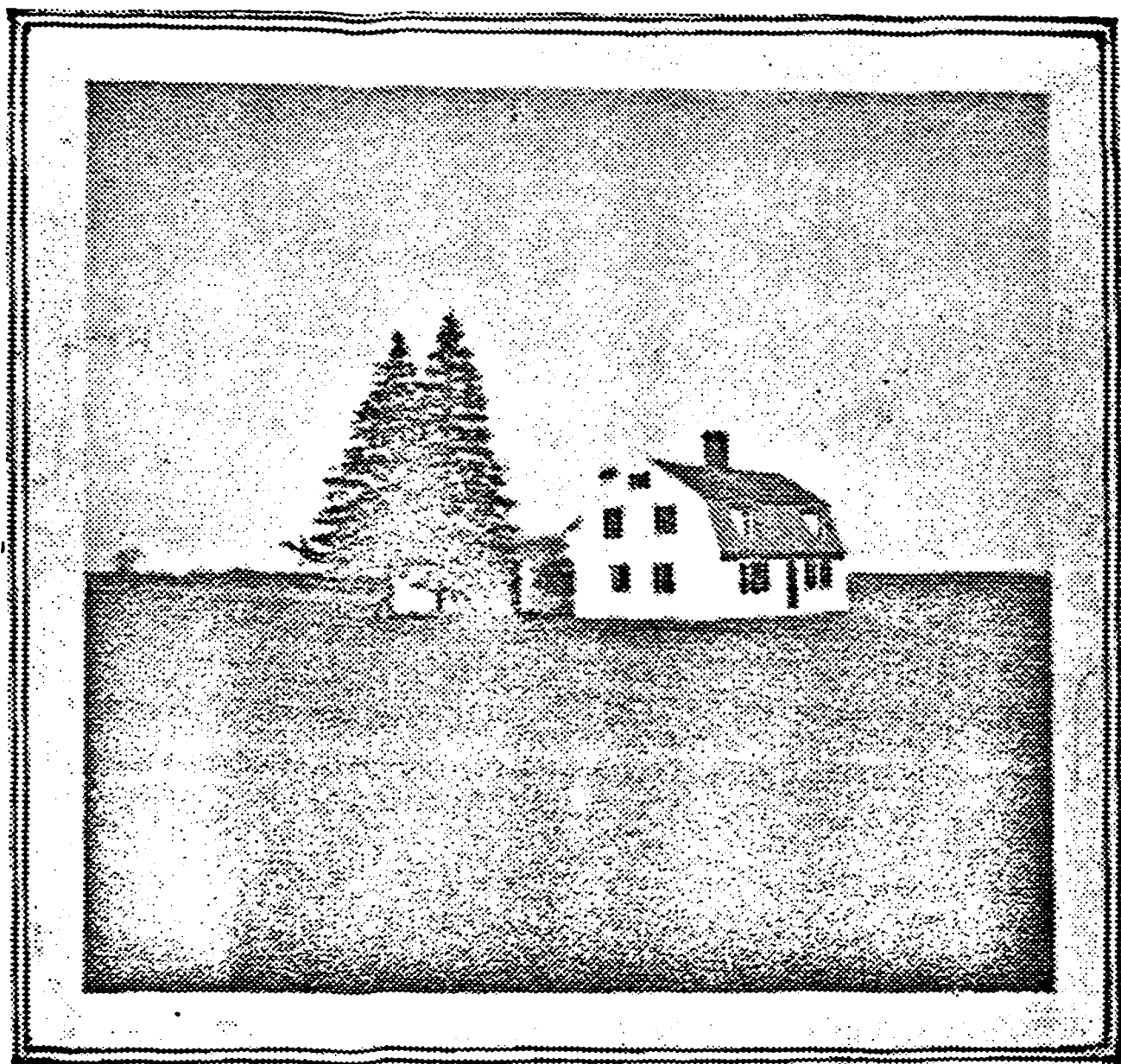
In such a land of Slocums it is not strange that four Slocums married four Wings. Marrying your next door neighbor was the fashion then. Many of their descendants followed the sea, for down there the call of the sea is everywhere. Great ships, afar off on the bay, with the sunlight on their sails, are enchanting. The wife of an ancient mariner told me the ships always looked better coming into port than going out. John Wing sat on the "high seat" at the Friends' Meeting, and in its quiet God's acre, he rests with his wife, Mercy Almy, and many of their kin and sect.

These old-time Friends are plainly drawn in the simple words of John Greenleaf Whittier:

"The Quaker of the olden time!  
How calm and firm and true,  
Unspotted by its wrong and crime  
He walked the dark earth through.

"O spirit of that early day,  
So pure and strong and true,  
Be with us on the narrow way  
Our faithful fathers knew!"





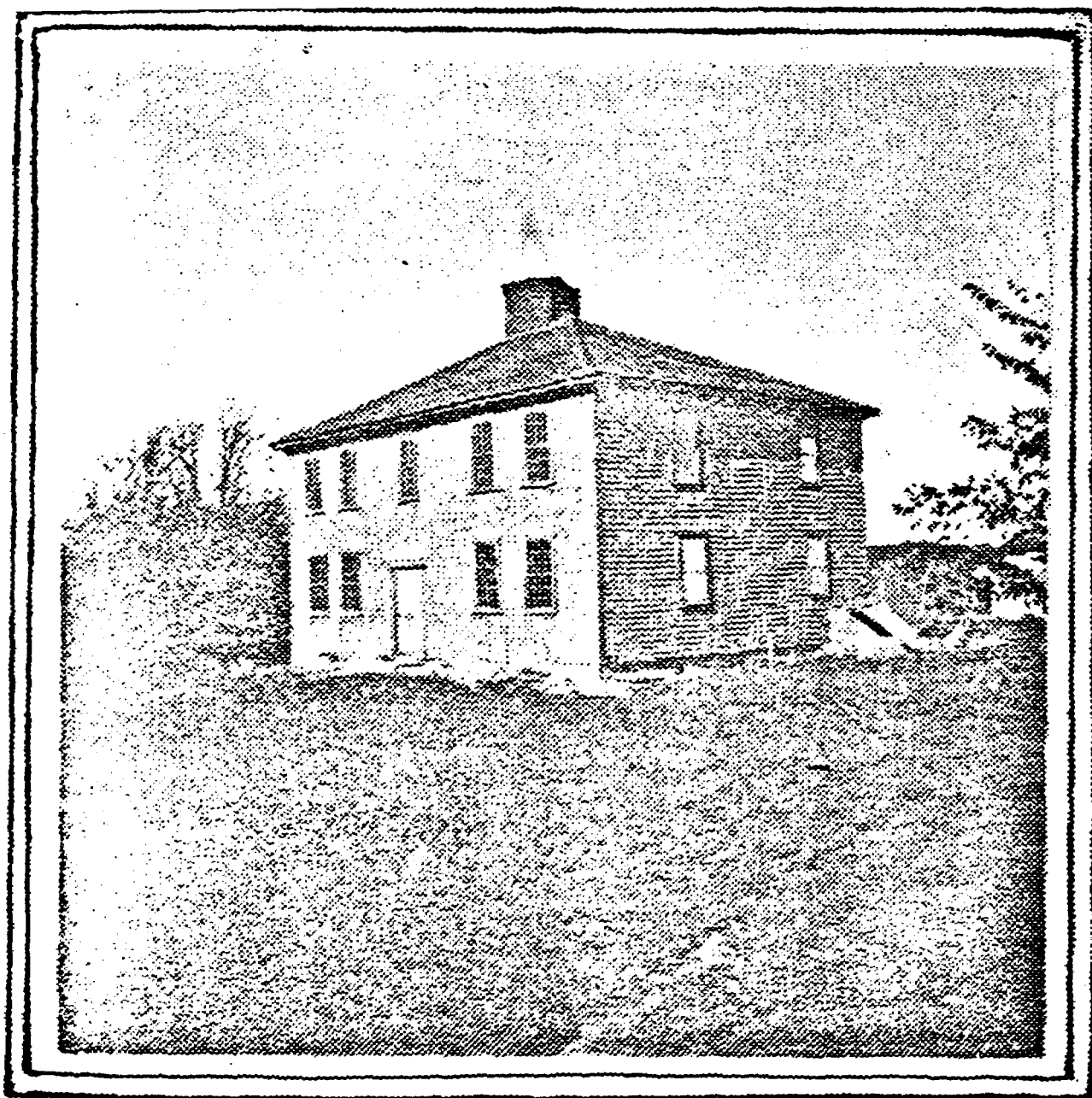
"THE SECOND GAMBREL" HOUSE OF JOB ALMY  
1747





"QUANSET," THE JOB ALMY MANSION  
1770





"THE DUTCH CAP." HOME OF JOHN AND MERCY (ALMY) WING  
1790

