

## GLOUCESTER'S COLONIAL-ERA MILLS: LITTLE RIVER

### Little River – 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century water-powered mills

Jacob Davis and others were granted the first stream privilege on the Little River, West Gloucester, in 1682. By 1685, Mr. Davis and his son, also named Jacob, and others were given liberty to cut enough logs from the town common to make 10,000 feet of boards per year so presumably Jacob Davis made good use of his stream privilege and had constructed his mill by then. As with many grants of sawing rights, the Town specified a low price to keep the wood in Gloucester:

Jan 20 1667[...] At the same time the town also vote that there shall be none cut on the north east side of the path that we used to go in before the new way was marked out from Goodman Parson's house round the head of Little River to Goodman Haskell's Dec 29 1669 It was agreed that there should be no cord wood sold out of town under three shillings and sixpence per cord (Babson. pp. 203-204)

In 1719, the Town voted to allow construction of a private way to the sawmill but does not mention the name of the petitioner. A detailed description of the route of a highway laid out by the Selectmen in 1732 does not include the name of Davis. It appears that the house closest to the mill(s) (there may have been more than one) was that that “was formerly” Thomas Giddings’ though it’s unclear who owned the house in 1732 and if the owner was also the mill owner at that time. (Highway Petitions, Reports, Orders, Bills, Etc. 1698/1873. Gloucester City Archives)

On the “Map of Gloucester, Cape Ann, Showing the Location of the Early Settlers” (Early Settlers), Jacob Davis’s property is identified. Thomas Giddings’ property is not. On Mason’s 1830 map, the site of the mill is located just below what looks to be a small mill pond. Based on the location of the head of the Little River and the roads depicted on the two maps, it appears that the Davis Mill was located at the present site of the West Gloucester water treatment plant.

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#### From: *Town Records, Vol. 1 & 2. Some transcription*

1649

10 acres of fresh marsh at the head of Little River set aside for a teaching elder. (Town Records p. 9) [several 1649, 1657 land grants near Little River identified in pp. 15-18, 24, 25, 28, 36, 41, 42, 47, etc.]

1650

Land Sould & Recourdded to the buyers as fouldoeth from the 4of the 8 mo 1650.

**George Ingarson** hath sould unto **Stephen Glover** [...] And six acres of upland at the hed of the Little River.

Little River

All which ground as it appears in the seventh and twelfth folio with housenn: doth George Ingarson by this presents formly inrowl [enroll] unto Stephen Glover and his heirs [heirs] to have and hold forever. (l, p. 36)

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1669

Jacob Davis doth record unto Joseph Eveleth five acres of fresh marsh Leay in fresh marsh above the head of Little river to him and his heirs for ever. (l. p. 93)

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1682

**Jacob Davis** and others have **liberty of the stream** at the **head of the Little River** to **set up a sawmill**. (Babson footnote)

1682

19 of 12: mo 1687 att a Town meeting which was the generall Town meeting in that year Jacob Davis and others joyning a Longe with him hath **Liberty of the streame** att the **head of the Little River to sett up a saw milne** (Town Records Vol 1, p. 131)

1685

the 15: and 16: day of the 12 mo 1685 was the generall Towne meeting held in Gloster where was an adition to the grant above mentioned given to **Jacob Davis son** to the aforementioned **Jacob Davis** and others that was to Joyne with him **Liberty to cut Logs** upon the Towne commons as many as will make Ten thousand foot of bords per year and the Inhabitants for there pay is to have bords for there use five shillings better cheep in a thousand than they sell out of Town to strangers and to pay one shilling p Thousand in money to the use of the Towne for all bords that is sould out of the Towne (Town Records Vol 1, p. 131)

1687

at a town meeting the 27<sup>th</sup> February 1687

given to **Jacob Davis** six acres of ground and laid out by the Lot Layers this 6 acres of Land Layeth a Long by the sid of ther Land which is above recorded and cometh to a point at the upper end by the swamp for it is bounded with the same hemlock tree at the wester corner that the tenn acres above mentioned is bounded with and it is bound by the marsh side with a white oak a little within the fence that is now standing this whit oak is about 47 rods from the red oak which was the bounds tree by the **water side of this ten acre of ground** which is above recorded. (Town Records Vol 1, p. 131)

1719

[town meeting June 23, 1719]

7. said town meeting voted an allowance and confirmation of **a private way** on ye westerly side of ye **head of Little River**, laid out by said selectmen from the landing place

Little River

and so on ye wester side of the brook **up to the sawmill**, as it is more at large described, by sd selectmen, and entered in sd Book p. 100 (Town Records, Vol 2, p. 211)

1732

Town meetings in Gloucester 1732

A description of a **highway** laid out by the Selectmen May 31, 1731, at the Request of sundry of the Inhabitants of that Town [?] leading from the way that leadeth **from Little River to James dikes to the sawmill by the Hous that was formerly Thomas Giddings** thus then northeasterly bounded beginning at the southwesterly corner of James Pikes fenc there northwesterly by said Dikes fenc as said way leadeth till you come to land in the possession of Capt Isaac Evelith Junior and Charles Riles and so on by said Eveleth and Royles [sic] land till you come to land of William Maning and so by said Manings land till you come to land of Mr. John Robards and so on by said Robards land until you come to land of Mr. Peter Coffin and so on by sd Coffins land until you come to land of Mr. John Riggs and so on by said Riggs land until you come to land of Let [?] William Haskell and so on by sd Haskell's land till you come to land of Joseph Haskell and so on by said Joseph Haskell's land till you come to the way that leadeth from the precinct meeting house **to the above said mills** and there are the northeasterly bounds of said way: said way is bounded to the southwesterly side partly by land of David Haskell partly by land of Mr John Robards and partly by land of Capt Isaac Evelith and partly by land of Mr James Dikes and the Bounds of the obove mentioned Parsells of land the bounds of said way confirmed March 7, 1731/2

Thomas Witham  
Ebenezer Davis        Selectmen  
Ebenezer Parsons  
James Lane

(Town Records Vol 2, pp. 272-3)

[Fernwood Lake was originally Mayo's Swamp. Wallace's Brook was located between Mayo's Swamp and the head of the Little River. Saga of Cape Ann, P.197]

[Town Records, Vol 3 – several Rusts, all located around Little River. No specific mention of a sawmill through]

[G. M. Hopkins 1884 map (historicmapworks.com) of West Gloucester shows a J. T. and a J. F. Davis on the west side of the mouth of the Little River]

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**From: *History of the Town of Gloucester, Cape Ann*, John J. Babson. 1860. 350<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition**

1682

Little River

From footnote: **Jacob Davis** and others have liberty of the stream at the head of the Little River to set up a sawmill. Jeffrey Parsons, sen., Samuel Sargent, and Job Coit, have liberty of a stream, or brook, between Fresh-water Cove and Kettle cove, and set up a sawmill. (footnote, p. 202)

**Jacob [Davis]**, the other son of the original settler John Davis, married Elizabeth Bennet Jan 20 1661 and had nine children of whom two were sons, Jacob and Aaron, who married in town. He had a grant of land at the head of Long Cove in 1662 and **in 1682, he with others, had a grant of the stream, at the head of Little River, “to set up a sawmill on.”** He died Sept 2, 1685. Half of a slope and four canoes valued at 12 10s formed part of his estate. **His son Jacob carried on the mill**, though he resided for a time in Ipswich. He probably built the old house which still stands near the mill stream and arrests the attention of every passer by its venerable and antique appearance. He married Mary Haskell Sept 14 1687 and died Feb 1, 1716, From aged fifty five leaving sons Moses William Aaron and Joseph (p. 78 – no citation)

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## Maps

### 1831

*Map of Gloucester, Cape Ann.* Created by: John Mason. Publisher: Senefelder Lithographic Co., Boston

This map shows what is probably a small mill pond at the likely location of the Davis mill.

### Notations not dated

*Map of Gloucester, Cape Ann showing the location of Early Settlers.* The base map is Mason’s 1831 map of Gloucester. The location of early settlers is variously attributed to John Babson, James Pringle, and unknown.

### 1851

*Map of the towns of Gloucester and Rockport, Essex Co., Massachusetts*  
Author: Walling, Henry Francis, Publisher: Kollner, A., 1851

Little River: D. & J. Bray Sawmill, at water treatment plant location, across the street from Wallace Court

### 1872

*Atlas of Essex County Massachusetts from Actual Surveys and Official Records.*  
Compiled and Published D.G. Beers & Co. 320 Chestnut St. Philadelphia. 1872. [many of the buildings mapped are not identified. Accompanying maps is a list of subscribers which may explain the omissions]

Little River

Little River – D. Bray mapped but mill is not mentioned. W. Rust mapped on what is probably Laurel Road but not on the water nor identified as a mill. No mills identified on Little River.

### **1899**

*Atlas of Cape Ann: Gloucester, Rockport and Manchester Essex Co., Mass.*, Published by Geo. W. Stadly & Co., 36 Columbus Avenue, Boston. 1899

p. 16 right side Little River, sources an unnamed stream (Lily Pond doesn't seem to exist yet) and Wallace Brook Reservoir. A pumping station is already in place at the modern filtration plant site. Land adjacent to western side of upper stream is almost all owned by Mrs. A. Bray, eastern side by B Stanwood.

p. 16 right side parallel to Little Rive w/ source at Fernwood Lake is Mill Creek crossed by Stanwood Ave and Winthrop Ave. At northern end of Fernwood Lake is F.W. Homan's Ice House

### **2010**

Information about the current status of mill pond dams on the Little River can be found in [City of Gloucester Hazard Mitigation Plan](#), Metropolitan Area Planning Council.

Gloucester Watersheds – according to the Hazard Mitigation Plan there are “approximately” 15 dams in Gloucester (p. 44) many of which are remnants of ice ponds built in West Gloucester.

Fernwood Lake (p.47) – off Essex Ave 0.6 mi, 1<sup>st</sup> order stream (unnamed) – 1<sup>st</sup> of three impoundments – Fernwood Lake (owned by Gloucester DPW), Upper Banjo Pond (LePage Corp.), Lower Banjo Pond (train tracks owned by MBTA) – DEP says there is no outlet but there are culverts under the tracks owned by the T – see Tier 2 Report for Pond View

Little River – Essex and Magnolia Aves., 4.0 mi, 1<sup>st</sup> order, Fishway @ water treatment plant, dam @ Lily Pond (34 Acres) dam w/ fishway, Dykes Pond (110 acres) dam