



History Reclaimed:

Authentic American Vintage  
Lumber from the Parker Dexter  
1840's Barn in Topsham, VT

## Immigration

Thomas Dexter was born in England and immigrated to the New World in 1629 or 1630, bringing with him three children and multiple servants. The Dexter party was part of either John Endicott's or John Winthrop's fleet, the first and second Governors of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, respectively. Upon arrival to the colonies Thomas Dexter settled in Lynn, Massachusetts on an eight hundred acre farm and became known locally as "Farmer Dexter".



*John Endicott, the first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*



*John Winthrop, the second Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*

## Revolutionary War Captain

Between 1630 and the mid 1700's four generations of the Dexter family were born throughout the colonies. In October 28, 1753 John Dexter, the great-great grandson of Thomas, was born in Mansfield, Connecticut. John, like many of his ancestors, was prominent in the community serving as a selectman, a member of the legislature and representative to the provincial congress.

John enlisted as a Private in the Revolution Army in Captain Jonathan Nichol's company of minute-men from Mansfield. He quickly rose through the ranks in Colonel Storres Regiment to then Colonel Shumway's Company in 1777. He ultimately ended his service as a Captain in 1780. On April 15, 1779 John married Sarah Parker, daughter of Lieutenant Zechariah Parker, a fellow Revolutionary soldier. John soon moved his family to Pomfret, Vermont.

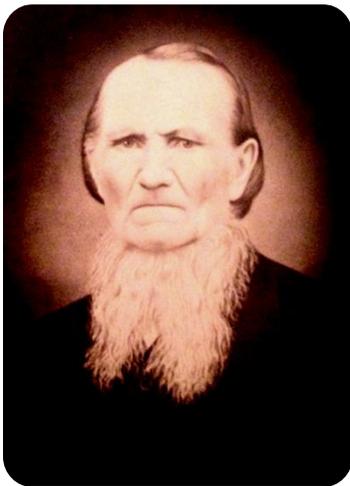


*John Dexter's headstone, reading:  
Soldier of the Revolution  
John Dexter  
Died Dec 10 1810  
AC 87 years*

*Bunker Hill Burying Ground Pomfret, VT*

## Parker Dexter and the Dexter Homestead

On November 8, 1797 John and Sarah Dexter had their seventh and last child Parker in Pomfret, Vermont. Parker was named after his mother's family name. After growing up in Pomfret, Parker Dexter married Elizabeth Betsey King, originally from Sutton, Massachusetts on April 13, 1820. Over the next 26 years the couple had 15 children. In 1836, the family moved from Pomfret, VT to Topsham, VT where Parker purchased a large track of land, on the Old Stage Road. He built his house looking westward to Knox Mt. on an elevated plain amongst the green hilltops of the eastern Green Mountains.



*Parker Dexter and his wife, Elizabeth Betsey (King) Dexter*

## Topsham and the Old Stage Road

Topsham, Vermont was settled by English emigrants who named the location after their home Topsham, England. On August 17, 1763 the town was officially granted by King George III of England and contained 23,040 acres divided into 88 equal shares. The charter required that each owner was to plant and cultivate 5 acres for every 50 acres owned.

The Town of Topsham, Vermont is bounded on the north by the Town of Groton in Caledonia County; on the east by the Town of Newbury; on the west by the Town of Orange and on the south by the Town of Corinth.

The topography of Topsham is hilly, consisting of narrow, fertile valleys, cultivated hillsides and "hill farms". The Old Stage Road through Topsham was cut out through the virgin woods by General Allen between 1784-1786. He began at the falls of Waits River, passed through the towns of Bradford, Corinth and Topsham. This road was for decades a major stage route from east to west across the state and afforded land owners along the thoroughfare an opportunity to sell wares and board travelers.



*East Topsham, VT circa 1930*

## The Original Barn

Accompanying Parker Dexter's house was a handcrafted 40' by 40' barn, built about 1840 complete with a large upper loft. Structural support beams were hand hewn from the surrounding lush forest's softwood trees. The exterior siding was milled at a local water powered mill with most boards measuring over 12 inches wide. The barn had many unique features for its time: a square foot print, slight gunstock posts, vertical run roof deck and intricate beam brace work.



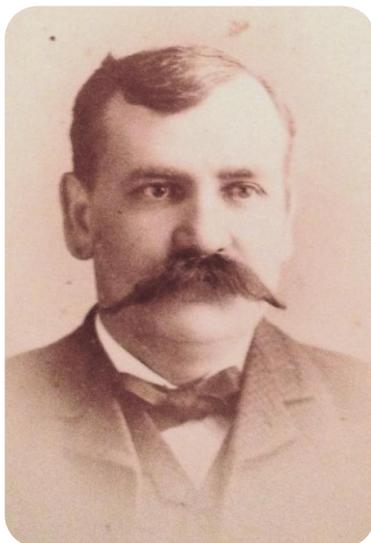
*Left: slight gunstock post, with larger top than bottom  
Above: intricate beam braces*

## The Homestead Grows

Parker and Betsey's 13th child, Solomon King Dexter, was born in Topsham on May 23, 1839. He worked on his father's farm growing up and attended public school in West Topsham. After working as a clerk in a local store, he moved to Lowell, MA. Solomon was busy and productive during his twenties, starting his own provision store, furnishing supplies to the Union Army in the Civil War and moving back to Vermont to open a general store. Ultimately Solomon settled back in Lowell permanently and became one of Lowell's most prominent businessman.

From the 1894 book Men of Vermont:

“For the past quarter century business men of Lowell, Mass., have numbered Mr. Dexter among their shrewdest and most upright produce merchants, where, at 260 Middlesex street, he early developed a large and successful business of wide extent. A splendid monument to Mr. Dexter’s success is the large and elegant building erected by him, for use of his business in 1885. It is a four story brick building, trimmed with granite stone and terra cotta, measuring forty by one hundred feet, and equipped with every facility for handling his great commission business.”



*Solomon King Dexter*

By the time of Parker’s death 1883 (Betsey had passed away four years earlier) the surrounding farms of his family’s original homestead in Topsham had been purchased by his children, undoubtedly with the help of Solomon. The giant property, said to have totaled over 1,000 acres, now served as a summer residence of Solomon and his many brothers and sisters extended families.

## The Mt. Knox House

Parker and Betsey Dexter’s third child, Alcina was born on May 19, 1824 and married Jethro S. Burgin in 1854. Although little is known about their lives, Alcina and Jethro had at least three children, with their oldest, Walter Parker Burgin having been born on April 27, 1860 in Topsham. By 1900, Walter had inherited a large piece of the 1000 acre homestead. He set to work on the property’s homes, building new structures and opening an Inn, The Mt. Knox House: “[they] enlarged and modernized till its accommodations are equal to the best homes in any city in the state. ..Mr. and Mrs. Burgin have thrown their commodious home open to tourists during the summer months. From 500 to 700 tourists are accommodated yearly, sometimes from 15 to 18 during a single night.”



*Mt. Knox House circa 1940, Courtesy of the Vermont Collection at Middlebury College*

## The Modern Barn

In 1907 as part of the property's modernization included the relocation and expansion of Parker Dexter's original 1840's barn. The barn was deconstructed one beam at a time, with its structural location written on each piece. The new barn had its footprint doubled, to 40' x 80' and a new first floor was added. The addition allowed for dairy cows to be kept on the ground floor, while smaller animals and hay split the second floor were the original beams were reused.

Two tiers of square windows were added to each side of the barn to let additional light in for the animals. Two new iconic barn metal roof vents were added and a new cedar shake roof was laid. The original wide board exterior siding was repurposed as a base for new horizontal white clapboard that wrapped the entire structure. The clapboard was manufactured by Heath and Rice in Granville, VT .



*Heath & Rice stamp on back of the Parker Dexter Barn clapboard*

## The 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Over the next century the property saw thousands of travelers pass through The Mt. Knox House. Season after season the Dexter farm fields were plowed, crops planted and cattle grazed in its expansive pastures. The rich surrounding forests were tapped of their sugar maple sap each spring and hardwoods logged for local mills to process.

Nevertheless, as time passed the original 1,000 acres was gradually sold off in pieces. Eventually the Parker/Burgin heirs sold the property to the Chaloux Family who continued to run the Mt. Knox House through the late 1960's. After the main Mt. Knox House fell into disrepair, the local fire department burnt it to the ground in the 1970's -- sparing the barn and leaving it as the only original standing building on the land.

After changing hands over the next 30 years, multiple different owners hoped to turn the 1840's Parker Dexter Barn into a house or art studio, yet no owner got beyond framing small interior sections of the barn. Eventually the high local winds ripped off parts of the modern metal roofing and it remained off for what locals stated was "decades". As a result the corner supporting posts where the roof was missing literally rotted away, and left the barn at high risk of falling into the adjacent road during a heavy snow.

## Reclamation

The current owners, the Woodwards, purchased a plot of the land which included the barn in 2012, and their first priority was to find someone to safely remove the structure so that they could build a more functional modern barn. Over the course of 6 weeks in spring 2013, the StoriedBoards team deconstructed the barn nail by nail. As a result, StoriedBoards' customers can *Reclaim History* and repurpose the beautiful materials from the Parker Dexter 1840's Barn in Topsham, VT for their own unique projects.



*StoriedBoards reclamation of the gray clapboard siding*



*Second floor interior*



*First floor milking parlor*



*Second floor from loft*



*Second floor barn board and beams*



*Second floor with metal roof removed*

## Past & Present



*Post Card of Mt. Knox House circa 1910 , with Parker Dexter Barn on the Left*



*2013 view of the barn*

## Past & Present



*Parker Dexter Barn (right) and Mt. Knox House buildings from the farm field circa 1900*



*Parker Dexter Barn in 2013*



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