

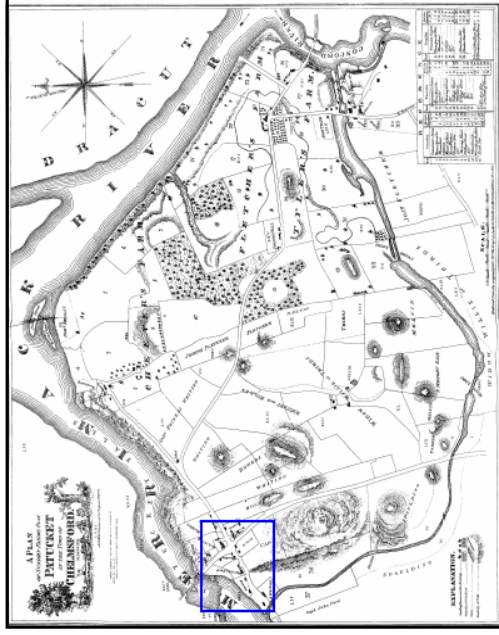
# Welcome to the Spalding House

## Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust

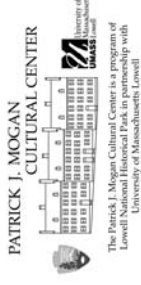
The Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, Inc. took ownership of the Spalding House in 1996 from the Molly Varnum Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. In 2000, the Trust was presented with a "Preservation Award" from the Massachusetts Historical Commission for excellence in historic preservation. The second floor features a 50-seat lecture hall with a unique swing-down door divider. In addition to programs and lectures held by the Trust, the House is available for special events. Please contact the office for more details.

Our mission is to improve the quality of life for the people of Lowell through the creation, conservation, and preservation of parks, open spaces, and special places.

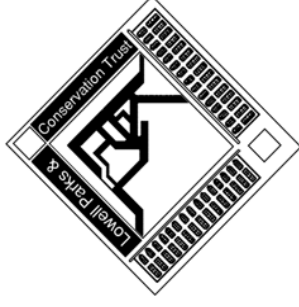
Welcome to a very special place.



The Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust, Inc. wishes to acknowledge the Lowell Cultural Council, the Patrick J. Mogan Cultural Center, the Relevance Company, the Lowell Historical Society, and the Chelmsford Historical Society for their assistance.



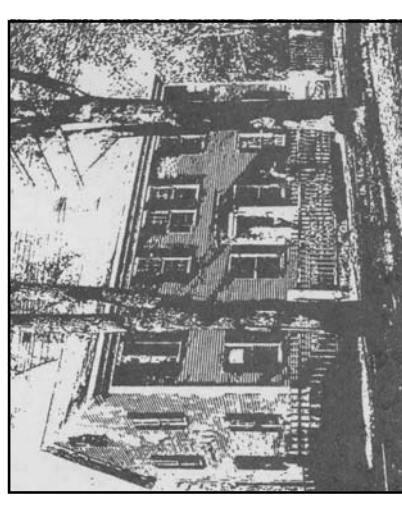
Based on research by Paul Hudon, Ph. D. *The Spaulding House and its Site, 1760-1790, 2002.*



## Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust

# THE SPALDING HOUSE

The Early Years 1760-1790



*The Spalding House as it appeared in 1907.*

## Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust

Please consider becoming a member and supporting the Spalding House Restoration Project.

Donations may be mailed to:

**Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust**

**P. O. Box 7162**

**Lowell, MA 01852**

**978-934-0030**

**[www.lowellandtrust.org](http://www.lowellandtrust.org)**

**The House before 1790**  
 Known today as the “Spalding House,” because of the Spalding family’s 116 years of ownership, the property overlooking the region’s most significant natural feature, the Pawtucket Falls, has a rich history. Built in 1760 in East Chelmsford, an agrarian community under the colonial rule of King George, the American Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, and the city of Lowell, were far from people’s minds. Still many changes took place during the House’s first 30 years which reflect a time in American history that has long since vanished.

**A Distinctly American Landscape Emerges**  
 In 1726, the Wamesit Purchase or Indian town of Pawtucket was annexed to the town of Chelmsford, Massachusetts which was incorporated in 1655. The Wamesit Purchase reached on its northern tip to the Merrimack River and its southern boundary to the Concord River. Today, it is the downtown area of Lowell.

In June 1758, a 10-acre parcel alongside the Merrimack River at the Pawtucket Falls in Chelmsford belonging to Joseph Tyler, Sr, was purchased for 6 pounds 13 shillings by Robert Hildreth, a house-wright. At the same time, Mr. Hildreth bought a three-quarter acre

<i>Early Spalding House Owners</i>	
Robert Hildreth	1758-1761
Reuben Hamblet	1761-1768
Moses Davis	1768-1773
Joseph Tyler, Jr.	1773-1774
Andrew Fletcher	1774-1777
Captain John Ford	1777-1789
Nathaniel Ropes	1789-1790
Joel Spalding & family	1790-1906

meadow from Mr. Tyler. Two months later, he purchased additional land adjacent to the 10-acre parcel to be held in common and undivided between me the said Joseph Tyler and the said Robert Hildreth and so to remain undivided for the use of a Saw Mill Yard or Corn Mill.' This was an indication of Tyler’s and Hildreth’s business acumen, linking land ownership to business needs, as no legal business environment existed in the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to form a partnership.

Robert Hildreth’s success may have been better than the norm, and he was perhaps helped by the fact that the provincial economy was on war footing. In 1760, Mr. Hildreth built a five bay, center entrance home on his 10-acre property. One year later, Hildreth died.

## M. DAVIS.

### Moses Davis Inn

With trade increasing in the mid 1730s, there was a need for a transportation route between the Pawtucket Falls and the mouth of the Concord River. This interior link, which is now Salem Street in Lowell, also became the route to the seaport of Salem, Massachusetts. With the increase in trade there arose a demand for accommodations.

During Reuben Hamblet (1761-1768) or Moses Davis’ ownership, two additional bays and a second chimney were added to the east end of the house. The entrance hall, main stair to the second floor, and upstairs meeting room were probably added at this time as well. Moses Davis operated the House as an inn from 1769 to 1773. The Inn ‘accommodated travelers passing through to Salem (MA).’ We learn this from Ebenezer Bridge, the town’s minister who kept a detailed diary, and visited the Davis establishment during its first year. Also noted in Bridge’s diary was a meeting of the Proprietors of the Wamesit Purchase held at Davis’ inn in August of 1773.

Moses Davis fought with 544 Chelmsford patriots in the War of Independence. He served as a private at Dorchester Heights in March 1776, the engagement that forced British forces to evacuate Boston. Upon his return he continued to be a notable citizen. Elected three times as a town selectman (1785, 1786, 1788), in 1788 he was chosen Moderator. Davis sold the house on September 25, 1773 to Joseph Tyler, Jr., who, a year later, on November 11, 1774, sold it to Andrew Fletcher. The deed indicates that Moses Davis may have stayed on to manage the Inn. A portion of the deed reads:

“Joseph Tyler sells to Andrew Fletcher, twenty acres of land for the sum of two hundred and forty-three pounds six shillings and twelve pence with the dwelling house where Moses Davis now lives and a barn that said Davis some time since built. Also a blacksmith shop and buildings used for a horse shed, all built by said Davis and some time since conveyed to me.”

Three years later, on February 8, 1777, Fletcher sold the house to Captain John Ford, for one hundred eighty-six pounds, fifteen shillings and four pence. The date on the deed is noted as “the first year of the Independency of the North American States.”

### The Hero or the Rogue?

Captain John Ford was born August 4, 1740 in Haverhill. He fought with the British against the French, and then joined the ‘patriot’ cause against the British. His company fought in the infamous Battle of Bunker Hill. Defying authority for liberty’s sake was apparently a trait of his character. But what was patriotism in 1776 was treason ten years later. He was duly imprisoned in Boston and indicted in May 1787, ‘being a disorderly, riotous and seditious person and minding and contriving... to stir up promote incite and maintain riots, mobs, tumults and

insurrection’ for supporting the Shayshites in the tax revolt of 1786. However, he recognized the error of his ways and accepted to take an oath of allegiance to Massachusetts on the last day of August in 1787, before the justice of the peace, Parker Varnum. Unfortunately, for Captain John Ford that was not the end to his dealings with the court.

On April 6, 1789, just days before George Washington was sworn in as chief executive of the new nation, Captain Ford was arrested and ordered jailed for debt. Nathaniel Ropes ‘Merchant’ of Salem was claiming Ford owed him ‘one hundred and seventy four Pounds nine Shillings seven pence.’ In these days before bankruptcy laws, debt was a criminal offense as well as a moral failing. Debtors were routinely jailed until they found a way to settle their accounts. Eventually, in July 1790, Nathaniel Ropes won a judgment at the court of common pleas against John Ford for debt. This time the house and property were conveyed to Mr. Ropes.

### Beginning of the Spalding Ownership

Very shortly after acquiring ownership of the house from John Ford, Mr. Ropes sold it to Joel Spalding, for ‘the full and just sum of Two hundred & Seventy Pounds lawful Money in Species.’ Three generations of the Spalding Family would go on to own the house between 1790 and 1906 when it was sold to the Molly Varnum Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. The Chapter operated the “Spalding House” as a museum and meeting place for 90 years.

**From soldier (Private Moses Davis, Captain John Ford, and Joel Spalding); to town selectman (Andrew Fletcher and Moses Davis) to businessmen (Robert Hildreth, Nathaniel Ropes, and Joel Spalding) the owners of the house at the Pawtucket Falls, the ‘Spalding House,’ were the American ideal-type, the self-made man. They all worked to shape their community, their land, and their laws.**