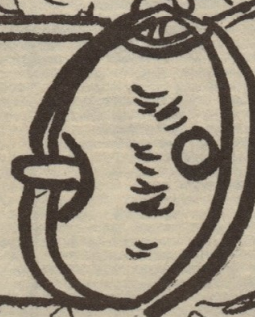


STRATFORD

**FROM INDIANS
TO INDEPENDENCE**



By Claribel Spamer

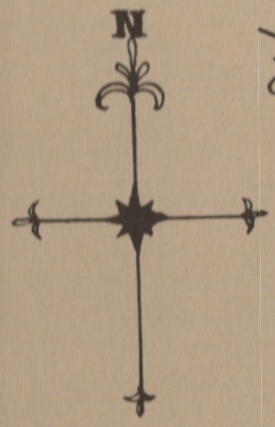
STRATFORD

FROM INDIANS
TO
INDEPENDENCE

CLARIBEL SPAMER

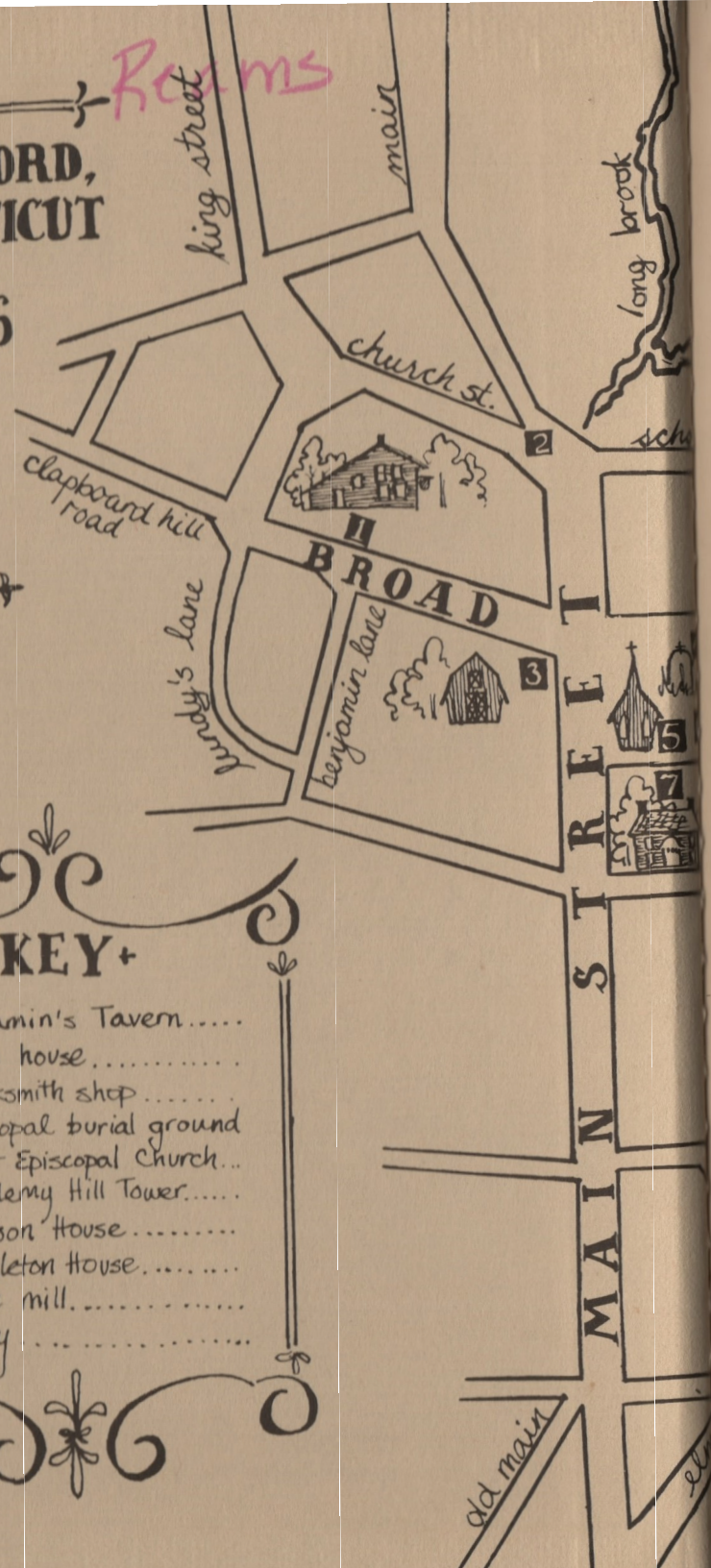
STRATFORD, CONNECTICUT

1776



+ KEY +

- 1 Benjamin's Tavern.....
- 2 town house.....
- 3 Blacksmith shop.....
- 4 Episcopal burial ground.....
- 5 Christ Episcopal Church...
- 6 Academy Hill Tower.....
- 7 Judson House.....
- 8 Pendleton House.....
- 9 tide mill.....
- 10 ferry.....



INTRODUCTION

Only to a limited extent are we prisoners of the past — it is the future that sets us free — it is our escape hatch. Claribel Spamer has, in essence, captured the past in this marvelously romantic children's history of Stratford. But she has also shown the way to "Independence" from the exciting Indian days of Chapter I. What is singularly most important about this book is the challenge she deliberately has set down for children — that of tempting their curiosity and hopefully encouraging them to find out more. This is already exemplified by the art illustrations which were executed by school children after some research and further study about a particular story.

From the very beginning the whole of our American experiment has been made up of unremembered bits of heroism, devotion and hope lodged in the hearts and minds of innumerable separate people. When some of these are brought together, as they have in this book, the country goes forward. That in the last analysis is the faith America has wanted to live by. We are always uneasy when we find ourselves keeping our noblest ideas and aspirations in mothballs carefully shielded from contact with society. Deep in our hearts we know we are supposed to take them out and work for them even if contact with harsh reality occasionally knocks chips off of them here and there.

I think Mrs. Spamer has achieved some of that direction and hopefully so will all of those who are fortunate to read it.

We are grateful also to Mr. Jeffrey Williams who had advanced the idea for this publication and had encouraged the Stratford Public School System and the Stratford P.T.A. Council in its publication.

John Olha
Superintendent of Schools

PREFACE

This story of Stratford is based on facts and on local legends which, although not proven, have not been disproven. I have used copious footnotes to try to elucidate which are which. For example, recent research seems to indicate that the Stratford people came by land. But, since it is logical that they could have come by boat, I have chosen the traditional version. Also, Orcutt maintains that they arrived in the spring, but new evidence seems to indicate it could have been fall. And in spite of our Wigwam Lane in the north part of Stratford, it seems the Indians of the northeast lived in bread-shaped domiciles. Yet I purposely retained the word "wigwam" in my story because of the exciting connotation it has for children.

I have tried to write a colorful, romanticized story of Stratford based on known facts as found in Howard Wilcoxson's "History of Stratford" and Samuel Orcutt's "History of Stratford and Bridgeport, Connecticut", and family legends, reportedly true, handed down through my family (direct descendants of Elizabeth Curtiss) and my husband's family (direct descendants of Reverend Adam Blakeman). My main purpose has been to motivate the young people of Stratford to take an interest in their wonderful heritage here, and to present a challenge to them to seek out information for themselves by visiting the Stratford Historical Society and consulting the well-informed people there, and by re-

searching in school and library books more about the way people lived in colonial times.

I realized that the vocabulary is much too difficult for youngsters in the lower grades, but again I felt that, if I simplified our wonderful history too much, a great deal would be lost. I leave it to the teachers to use this text in whatever way fits their particular groups or grade levels best. The footnotes are for teacher use, and should not encumber the story in its initial telling.

I would like the reader to know, too, that I researched the dates and the people very carefully in Orcutt's genealogical section, so that all the characters and dates are authentic with exception of Towtaheag and his brothers, although undoubtedly Okenuck had sons. Youthful heroes and heroines are necessary if our young people are going to identify with the story, but, in handling it this way, I had to sacrifice the present tense method to the flashback method, because a child cannot describe traveling with George Washington or fighting beside General Wooster. Therefore the famous personages who are part of our Stratford history are only touched upon, again leaving it to the individual to pursue their stories more fully. This device had to be used also as a way to keep the story locale right here.

In researching dates of events as they corresponded with individuals' ages I chose representatives from the original families in a somewhat random way, since I had to find a child old enough to be aware of what was going

on in any given generation, young enough to interest the youthful readers, and yet at a time when things of importance were happening. There was no attempt to leave some families out or include some families; one could call it a sampling of the people — or an historic cross-section — to give some awareness of the old names.

I made mention of the way of life in Stratford wherever I could fit it in in a natural manner, i.e. soap-making grinding of grain, water from wells, weaving, etc. Again, further research into such topics will inform the children that it was a whole way of life in colonial times not only in far-off places like Plymouth but right here where they are.

Finally, I tried to link each chapter with the previous one through a clue from one person to another, which device I believe will be obvious.

The illustrations, done by Stratford young people, represent their interpretation of the events depicted in the book. The artistic styles differ as the chapters of the book differ with the generations.

I especially want to express my gratitude and thanks to Jeffrey Williams for the many hours of his time and his dedication given coordinating this project.

I have merely brushed the surface, but, if in doing so I have stirred up little pools of interest on the part of the young people, I will have achieved what I tried to do.

Claribel Spamer

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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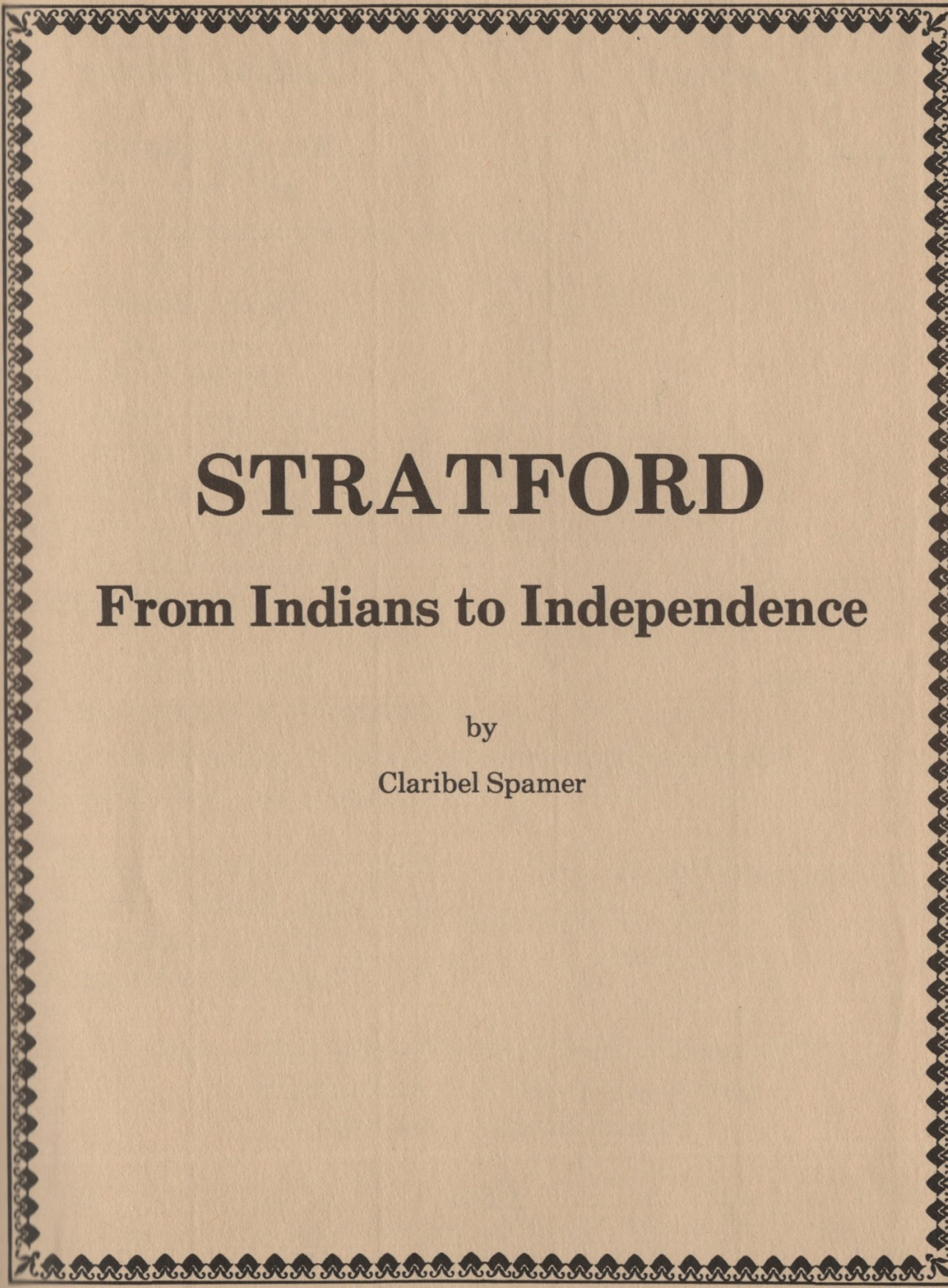
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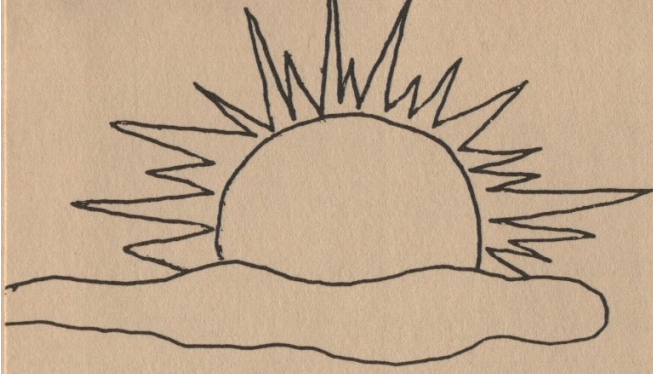


STRATFORD

From Indians to Independence

by

Claribel Spamer



CHAPTER ONE

TOWTAHEAG'S MOST EXCITING DAY

(As told by Rev. Adam Blakeman for Towtaheag, son of Okenuck, in the spring of 1640)

One day in the spring of 1640 when I had nothing to do I went to the village of Cupheag¹ where the white people were still putting a palisade around their wigwams.² Cupheag is our word for "sheltered harbor" and is the village Sachem³ Blakeman and his people have made. Their wigwams aren't like ours but are made of wood from cut trees, and the roofs are thatch. They aren't much bigger than ours, though.

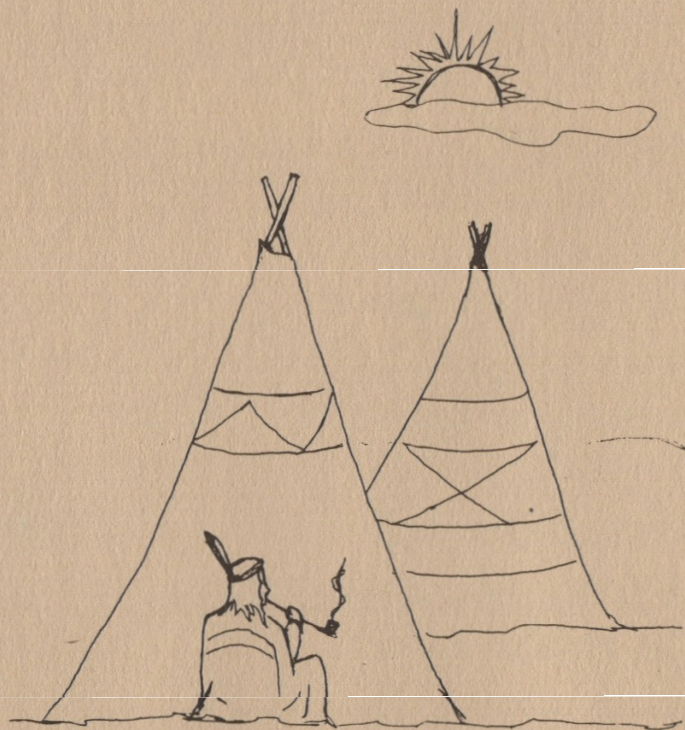
As I came up to the village through the woods, I could hear men's voices and the sound of axes. I poked my head carefully around the end of the stockade on which I knew they were still working. It is a very big job to



surround a whole village with a stockade. If my father and the other sachems had not already decided that the white men would not harm us, our great numbers⁴ could easily have killed the few families of them before they had been there a day. But my father, who is Okenuck, sachem of Pootatuck,⁵ said we might as well be friends. We can hunt, trap, and fish much better than these new people, so there is no worry for us. The stockade will help to keep the wolves out of Cupheag, though.

As I looked, Sachem Blakeman, who had raised his axe to split a log, looked too, and he saw me. I ducked back. But he is a kind man. He seems to like me and, when he gets a chance, he tells me about the white man's God. He calls me "a little heathen". So I looked again. Two of the men were chopping and trimming trees a little way off, and two more were raising the posts that had been split by the sachem. The stockade had grown much since I saw it last.

The sachem smiled and beckoned me over.



I told him how different everything looked since the day I saw them arrive, with the land now cleared and the little houses built in rows and the watchhouse on the hill⁶ from which the stockade ran down and would surround the whole town. He asked me to tell him about that day. He said he'd like to write it down so that his children could read it someday. I told him it was the most exciting day of my life. I knew, of course, that he'd have to find white men's words for what I would say because he and I could only talk with a few of his words that I had learned, and a few of mine he had learned, and signs. But I told him . . .

The day the white men came my father and I had come down the Pootatuck, which means "falls river". We had come in my father's canoe because the days were warm again,⁷ and we knew we could get oysters and catch fish at the river's mouth. We were glad because the easy times had come when we would not be cold or hungry. My brothers were still in the village with the other families, who would come when my father told them to. I was proud he had let me go first with him. Quantaway was going to chip more arrowheads,⁸ for he and I had lost a lot of them shooting at rabbits in the fields⁹ south of Pootatuck, and he had found some quartz very good for that purpose. Sometimes we can find our arrows again, but not always. Sewanka, my other brother, was working on a grinding bowl and grinder for my mother to grind the maize. He had found two very good stones for that.

My father and I were standing with my grandfather,

Ansantaway, who had slept with us the night before on the point of land on the east side of the river¹⁰ where the piles of oyster shells are,¹¹ by which we now were. He had come from his village to the east¹² and met us. I love the view from the point, for you can look across the wide blue sea¹³ to Sewanhacky¹⁴ and nothing is to be seen except the gulls, swooping and diving in the sun.

But this day was different. Coming into the river mouth were three boats, not at all like Indian canoes. I had never seen a white man, but I knew that white men would be on these boats. We watched for a long time, and they turned into the little harbor¹⁵ at Cupheag.

My father sent me across the river to build a fire to signal our tribe about the coming of these people while he remained to watch. He told me to take my grandfather's canoe, for the current is strong for swimming, and I did, being carried northward, for the tide was coming in, and landing a little south of the hill. I hurried to light the fire and send the smoke signal for I was eager to get back to the point. I knew the Indians whose wig-



wams were on the hill about three miles north would see my message and build their own fire to send it on. Every Indian knows how to make smoke talk, even boys younger than I.

I had not rejoined my father again for long before the canoes began to come in great number down the river, and a great many of us watched the white men's landing. We wondered why you had come and if you would stay. Through the summer we watched you build your homes.



When the sachems met with my father and decided they would not make war on you, they felt that we can show you things and you can show us things. Those little clearings you asked about – we made them to grow maize. I will give you some of the dried kernels we saved for seed from last year, and help you make the little hilled rows of dirt for them, if you will show me how to make an axe like yours.

-
1. At Elm and Birdseye Streets, possibly not called Cupheag till later.
 2. Indians houses in this area could have been bread-shaped.
 3. Sachem means chief.
 4. About 2,500
 5. Shelton
 6. Academy Hill
 7. Orcutt maintains the arrival was in the spring, but is is possible that it was not until fall.
 8. Arrowheads found in Stratford can be seen at Stratford Historial Society.
 9. Present location of Sikorsky Plant
 10. Milford Point
 11. The shells have been removed but were there until about 40 years ago.
 12. Milford
 13. Long Island Sound
 14. Long Island (Island of Shells)
 15. Mac's Harbor, named more than a century later for a black man, spelled Mack, who gathered oysters in the area for use in making plaster. It is possible the settlers came by land; tradition has been that they came by sea.

CHAPTER TWO

A VISIT TO NEW FYELD

*(As told by Mary Blakeman, daughter of
Reverend Adam Blakeman, in her diary May 20, 1651)*

This morning, when I went to the spring for water, the sun was not long up, and the sky was pink over the inlet.¹ Our house faces that little bay, and I can remember the day our ship sailed into it twelve years ago. I was only four years old, and I was very frightened by this strange place of trees and wildness, where there were no people and no houses. Afterward we learned there are many Indians, but they have helped us much. Towtaheag did me a favor today by taking me to New Fyeld, but that comes later. He is an Indian, and, when we arrived at Cupheag, he was only a boy and he saw us coming.

I thought what a lovely day it was going to be, but the sight of the meeting house made me shudder, for it was only four days ago that poor Goody Bassett was tried there and found guilty of witchcraft. The governor came all the way from Hartford for the trial.² Father wouldn't let me go because I am only sixteen, but, since I am old enough to marry, I should think I'd be old enough for everything. I didn't want to go anyway, though, so I didn't mind. I couldn't have borne to see the poor woman suffer, but I don't dare to say so, for they say she was really evil. They took her to a place near where the stone bridge crosses Old

Mill Road and hanged her.³ Father says that the Bible says witches must be put to death. Everyone seemed afraid of her. None of us knew her much, for she came to Stratford only a few months ago, and lived in a tiny cabin Towtaheag built for her. Maybe she thought by coming here that she would not be caught. Already I have heard people call that little brook⁴ that goes under the bridge Gallows Brook. I wish they wouldn't do that. It would be best forgotten.

When I returned with the water, John, James, and Samuel, three of my brothers, were already starting for New Fyeld⁵ with Joshua Atwater, who is from New Haven but is staying with Moses Wheeler.⁶ Joshua is my fiance,





and he is helping the boys clear our new land of rocks and tree stumps. All the people have a share of land in the common fields, and we just got this new piece after the town leaders made a deal with Nesumpaw, whose wigwam was on this land. They let Nesumpaw keep his wigwam there for now, but they've fenced the land in to keep out the pigs and cattle, and it must be readied for planting.

I asked Father if I could go with the boys. After all, I could help a lot. But he said no because I must go to the tide mill⁷ with some more of our grain to be ground for Mother. He knows I don't get much chance to see Josh, though, so he said he'd ask Towtaheag to take me to New

Fyeld later. That's the trouble with being a girl. I'm not ever allowed to go anywhere alone. There are too many wolves around for it to be safe. He said Towtaheag was helping at the mill today, but that later on he'd probably be glad of a chance to see his friend, Nesumpaw.

I took the grain to the mill. It is only a few steps, but Mother is too busy to wait around. The tide was right, though, so I got the flour after a short wait. Towtaheag couldn't leave yet, so I walked up to the hill⁸ to watch the men drill under Sergeant Nicholls. He is in charge of defending our town, and the men must know what to do in case of attack. That's why Deliverance and Benjamin weren't also helping in the field. They are the oldest brothers, and they have to drill each morning.

I talked to the sergeant, and he let me go inside the watchhouse and look out. I love to do that. It is such fun to see so far — the town, the woods, the field, the water. The town is awfully little compared to all the rest of it.

By then I went back to the mill to see if Towtaheag was ready. I didn't want to stop home again, for I was afraid Mother would have found something more to do. There is always so much work—carding, spinning, weaving, baking, candle-making. I'd be ashamed if it weren't for the fact that Josh and I have only a few more months until we marry, and I figure, with him on one of his visits to Stratford, I'd only daydream so much at household chores that I would make mistakes and probably drive Mother crazy.

This time Towtaheag was ready, and went to the field, which is really pretty far from the village. Joshua took time off, although my brothers teased him, and we sat with Nesumpaw and Towtaheag in the shade of the wigwam and visited. After awhile Josh, the Indians, and I all helped the boys, and we went back to the town together in the late afternoon, tired but happy. It really was a wonderful day. I guess every day is a wonderful day for a girl soon to be married.

1. Mac's Harbor
2. There is a court record in Hartford stating that Goody Bassett was to be tried in Stratford and that the governor would attend.
3. West Broad Street at R. R. underpass
4. No longer in existence
5. Now St. Michael's Cemetery
6. The first Stratford ferryman
7. The mill was on the south side of Mac's harbor.
8. Academy Hill



CHAPTER THREE

THE GREAT WOLF HUNT

*(As told by Adam Blakeman,
grandson of the first Adam, in 1698)*

My name is Adam Blakeman. I am the son of Deliverance Blakeman, and the grandson of Adam Blakeman who came to Stratford in 1639 when it was nothing but wilderness here. My Aunt Mary used to keep a diary. When she and Uncle John came from Salem to visit last time, she let me read it. Uncle John Higginson is my aunt's second husband. Uncle Joshua died before I was born. My aunt was very young when she married him.

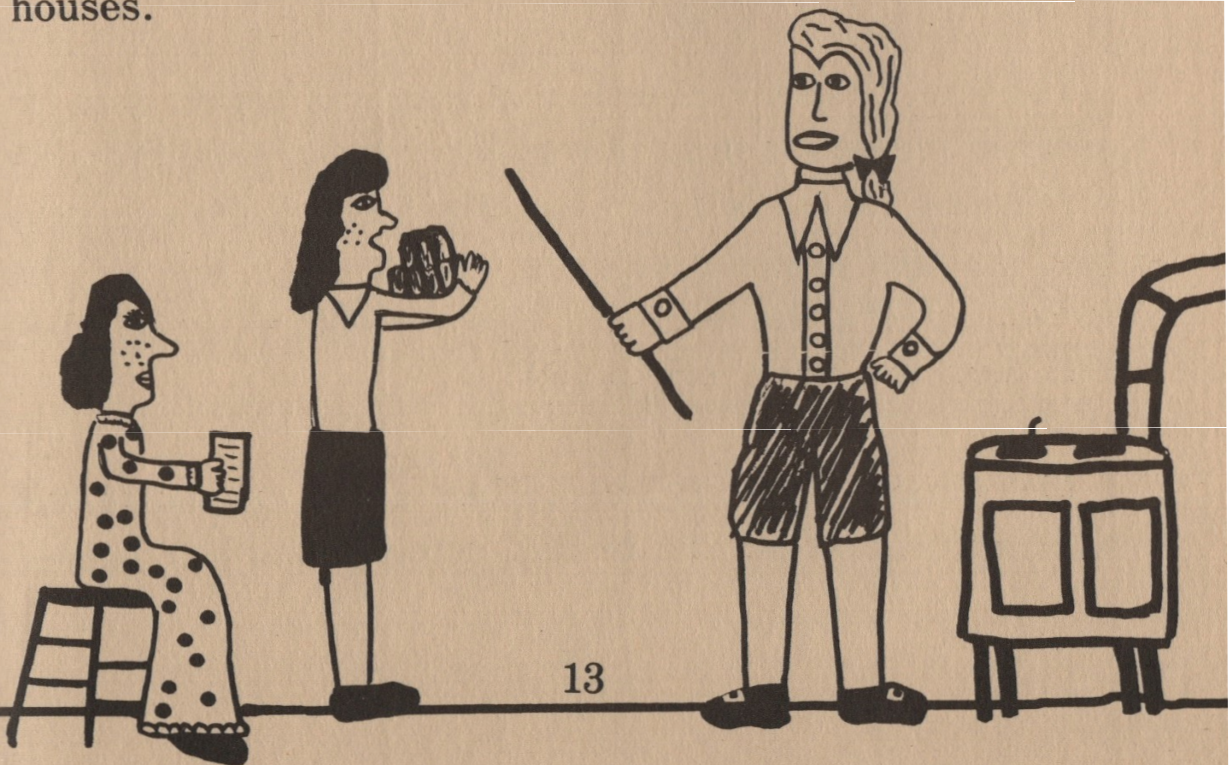
My father had four brothers but they are all dead now except Uncle Benjamin, who is a minister and lives in Boston. Uncle James built a mill at the place called Far Mill River, and it is run by my cousins now. My father was the wild one and, according to Aunt Mary, caused my grandparents a lot of worry when he was young. I can't imagine my father ever being like that. He is not now.

Aunt Mary and Uncle John come to visit us quite often, for Uncle John is an interpreter of the Indian language, and he is often needed. Stratford is big now, for many pieces of land have been bought from the Indians since Grandfather came. Uncle John took me out to see the Oak Tree¹ in a field about a mile from the wigwams at Golden

Hill.² Under it is where the Indians and our people meet to sign the land deeds. It is over two hundred years old, they say, and is the biggest tree around here.

When I saw the tree I got the idea of writing a record of my own, sort of on the idea of Aunt Mary's diary. There was a little hole in the tree, rather high up but I think I can get to it, probably made by a woodpecker. I decided I would write this, tell no one, and hide it in the tree. Someday someone might find it years from now and read all about me.

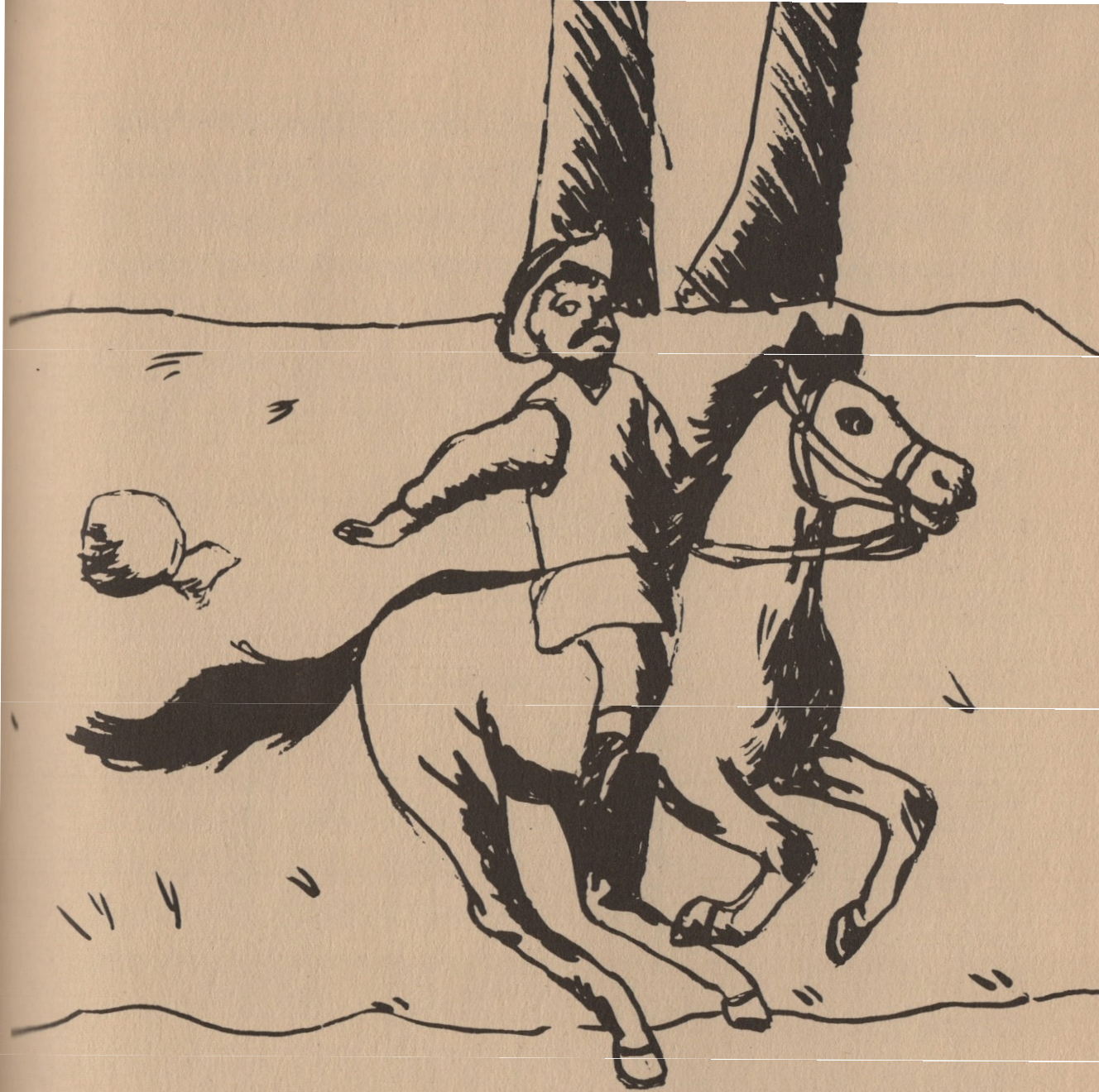
I thought maybe I'd tell Mr. Preston³ but when it got so cold in school today and he made me carry in more wood and build up the fire, it made me kind of mad at him. It wasn't really my turn, you see; it was Joseph's.⁴ Father says if the school weren't so near the river it wouldn't get quite so cold, but it's the only school in town, so there is nowhere else to go.⁵ In my father's day they didn't even have a school, but he had lessons at home and in other people's houses.





I'm kind of glad the school is near the river, though, because I like to stop to talk to Mr. Sam Wheeler⁶ on my way home. He is the ferryman. The ferry is the only way you can get across the river except in a boat or by swimming. It's Mr. Sam who told me all about the great wolf hunt five years ago in 1693.

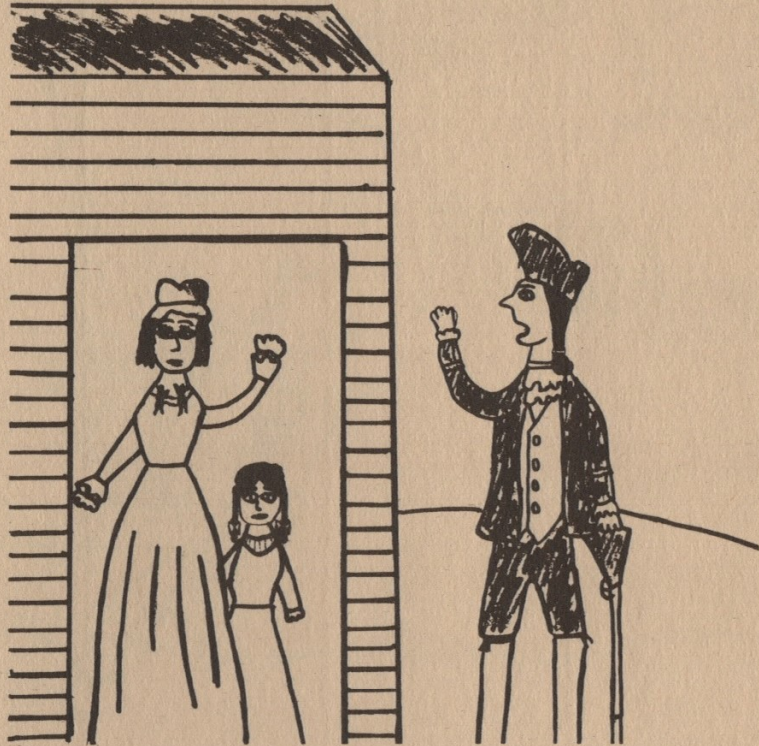
The wolves were very bad. They killed our cattle and were getting bolder and bolder, coming near our houses



and howling nearby in the night. It was getting unsafe to work in the fields or to come and go in the woods. Mr. Joseph Curtiss⁷ was coming down from Newtown with some bags of grain when a wolf pack attacked, and he had to throw the grain at them and spur his horse away in order to save his life. The fences that the people built don't keep the wolf packs out.

The people voted at a town meeting on April 17 of that year to do something about it. They planned a huge wolf hunt, and appointed fourteen men to be overseers of it. The overseers were the men who told the others where to go and what to do.

The next Thursday at seven in the morning the drums were heard up by the meeting house. That was the signal for all the men of the town to go there for the start of the hunt. Each overseer took his group in a different direction from town to the wooded and rocky parts where the wolves hole up. My father went too, but Mr.



Sam's group had the most excitement of any.

They went far to the north of town into a place of big rock ledges and woods. The wolf pits they'd dug near that place at other times had every now and then caught a huge wolf, and they wanted to find the lairs if they could. They did! Mr. Sam said they startled a female in her den. They had approached the rock cave offwind, but the wind suddenly swung around and she smelled them. They had no idea whether or not the cave was occupied, but, as it

turned out, she wasn't in it. She had gone for food for her young. Females are especially vicious when their young are threatened, but this one was also the biggest wolf any of the men had ever seen, and it was white! It leapt from the trees above the rock the cave was in, and it was only a miracle that Mr. Sam wasn't killed. Ephraim Stiles yelled, and Mr. Sam threw himself sideways and down by instinct, before he even knew what was happening. The wolf crashed into the thicket right where Mr. Sam had been an instant before. Ezra Beach was the quickest to shoot at it. He missed, but his shot scared it off just long enough for the others to get aim. Even then Ezra just missed being mauled by its fangs before it dropped dead practically at his feet.

Then there was the problem of the cubs. There were two. The men did bring them back. I was only six then, but I remember seeing them. They were cute as anything. All the children wanted to keep them. The men said that would make more trouble, and I suppose they were right. I don't know what happened to them.

They got nine wolves that day! Some of the Indians even helped, for they are bothered by them as much or more than we are. Orono, an Indian friend of mine, still wears his wolfskin hat with the tail on it that his mother made for him after the hunt.

I just heard the curfew⁸ ring, so it is nine o'clock and I must get to bed or Father will scold me. I think I will put this in the tree tomorrow if I have time to walk that far, and then if I write more sometime, I will put that in too.



N. BLOWERS

1. Called by Samuel Orcutt "The Historic Oak", which blew down in a storm in 1884 at about 400 years old
2. Located in downtown Bridgeport
3. Chosen schoolmaster by vote in 1698
4. Joseph Curtiss, b. 1687
5. Location of the first schoolhouse was unknown. Since settlement was near the river, school probably would be too.
6. Son of Moses Wheeler
7. Father of the schoolboy, grandson of Elizabeth Curtiss, original settler
8. Nine p.m. curfew voted Dec. 29, 1691

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TUNNEL

*(As told by David, son of
Captain David Judson, in 1725)*

I wanted to go out to The Tree again to-day. I thought it would be fun to take a picnic. It is my favorite private place to go. It is where some of the deeds were signed when the Indians sold their land to the white people. It



wasn't very fair to the Indians a lot of the time. They were told the land wasn't even theirs to sell, so they were eager to get rid of it fast sometimes.¹

I can't go, though, because I have to take care of Sam to-day. He is only five, and can't walk that far, for the tree is a few miles from here. Since the new church² opened on Christmas last year, I no longer need to help the men work



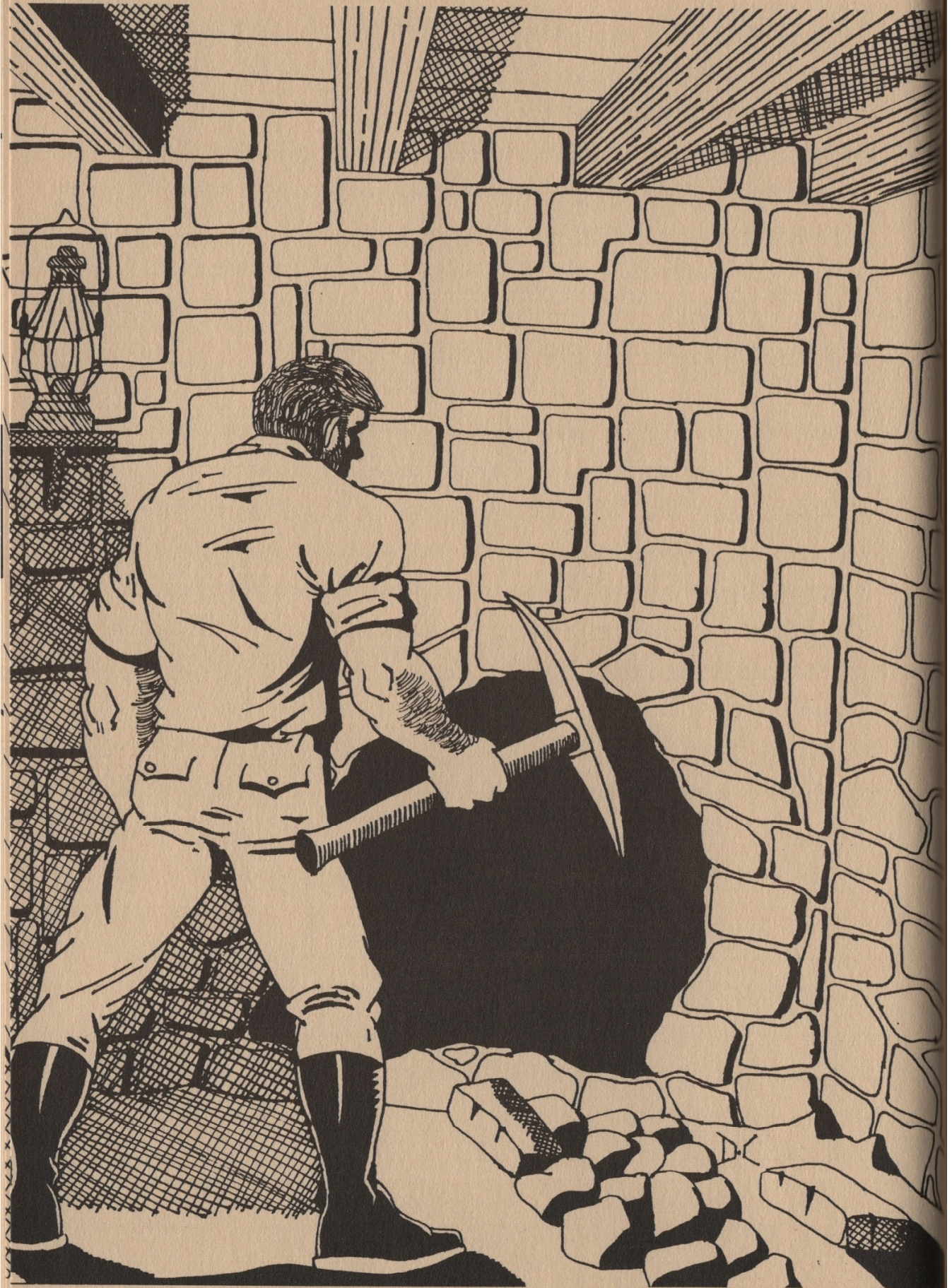
D.C.

on it. I was only nine then. I mostly just carried things anyway, like their drinking water, for instance, and sometimes their lunches. So I have more time now. Mrs. Adam Blakeman knows that, so she doesn't mind asking me to watch Sammy. She is going to make soap today, and Sam is apt to fall into the fire, or something. I don't mind helping Mrs. Blakeman for, after all, she has Jacob, who is only three, and Josh, who is only one, to watch out for. Sammy is a nuisance but he doesn't mean to be.

But, if I can't go to the Tree, I just got a better idea. Mr. Blakeman told me that, when he was a boy, he wrote a story about the Big Wolf Hunt and put it in a hole in that tree. He was only a year older than I am now. I could look for it, but I won't because it will be more fun for someone to find it in a hundred years or so. But my idea is that I can write about the tunnel in our new house.³ And guess where I'll put **my** paper! In the tunnel! I'm sitting here now in the backyard watching Sam, who is making mudpies, and I'm trying to make this pen work. I'm not much good at writing with a quill pen. This charcoal ink isn't much good either. Sometimes it works better than other times.

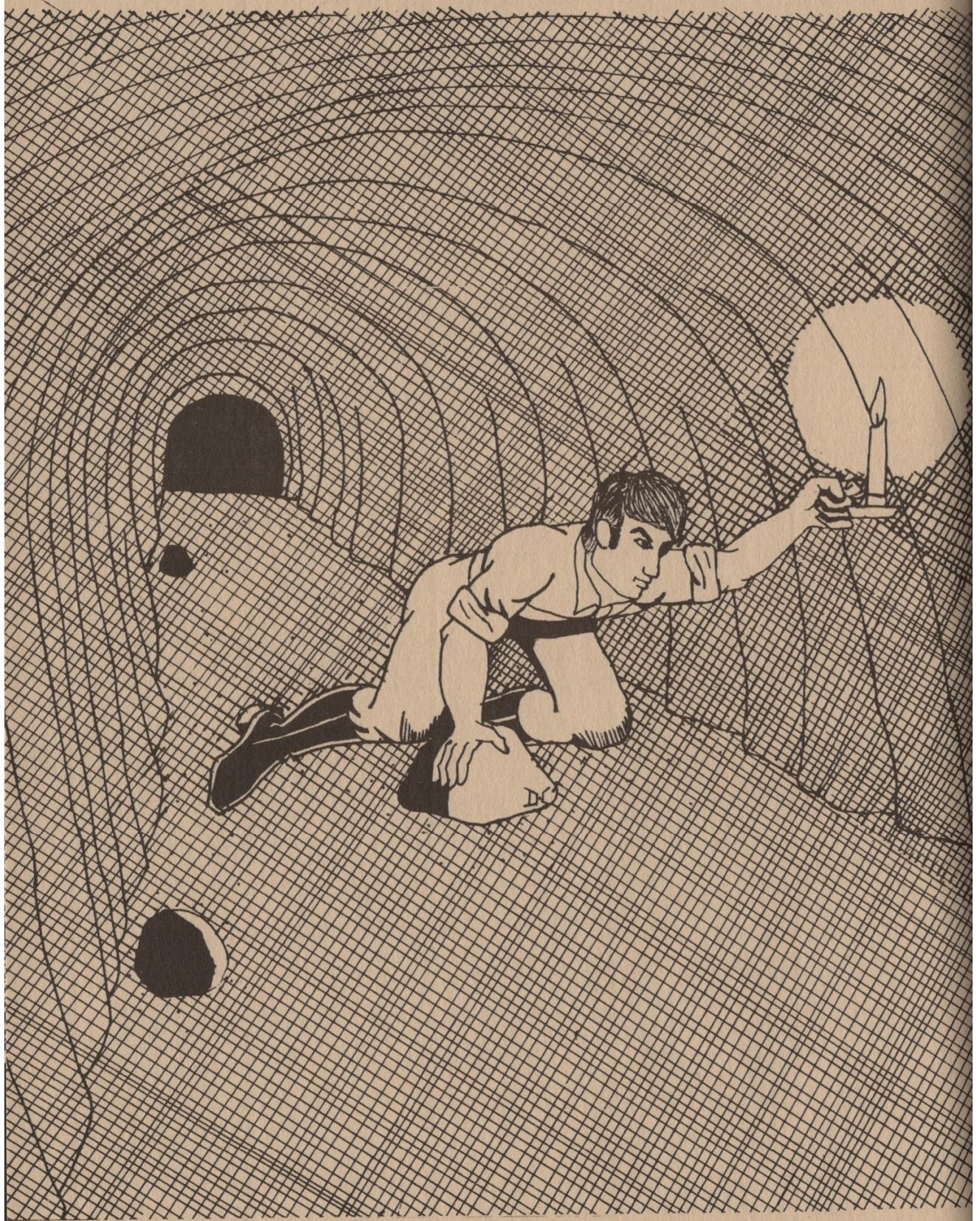
Our house is new. That is, it was built two years ago by my father, Captain David Judson. It is on the original cellar of the house my great great grandfather, William Judson, built. There was a stone house here before. It belonged to my grandfather.⁴ The stone house was cold and very old, and we needed a new one.

You should see it! There are six fireplaces. There are



ovens made of brick. The fireplace in the slave quarters where the cooking is done is huge! The walls of the house are panelled, and the windows all have twelve panes of glass. Over the front door is the thick bulls-eye glass, made by cutting off the end of the hot glass by the glassmaker. The knocker and the latches were wrought at the forge.

But now for the **really** important thing! In the cellar in the front of the cellar wall we found the old tunnel⁵ that went to the fort which used to be on the hill to protect the early settlers. If there were danger from Indians, the people could go from the house to the stockade without having to run across open ground. It had been walled up, probably by my grandfather because of the danger of its collapsing or because it had nowhere to go once the stockade was gone. But when the old house was gone, and daylight came into the cellar and the stuff stored by the wall had been removed, you could see the stones were different, and my father had them taken out. We crawled many feet under the ground to where the tunnel suddenly ended, under where the fort used to be. Rubble had fallen in some places, and it was very exciting and scary, our candles throwing shadows as we made our way along. My father says it will have to be closed again. Reverend Samuel Johnson⁶ was here to see us the other day, and I took him down in the cellar to show him our discovery. I wanted him to get my father to leave the tunnel open, but he agreed with Father that it would be dangerous because it could cave in. The Reverend has lived in Stratford only a couple of years, but everyone likes him. He wants to build a school here on our hill.



It looks as if I will have to stop now and take Sammy to the well and wash the mud off him, or his mother will never forgive me. I'm going to roll this paper up tight and put it in a stoneware jar, if Mother will let me have one, and fill the neck with wax to seal it in. Then I'll crawl into the tunnel as far as I can and leave it there. Someday a girl or boy may find it if the tunnel ever gets opened again.

-
1. 100 acres of the west side of the Housatonic River was sold by the Indians for this reason. The sale was later declared illegal.
 2. Now the site of the Episcopal Burying Ground
 3. The Stratford Historical House, Judson House, on Academy Hill
 4. A deed in 1696 gave the house to James Judson. James was the father of Captain David.
 5. The tunnel is legend, quite possibly true.
 6. Dr. Samuel Johnson worked to establish King's College in N.Y. and was its president. Columbia University grew out of King's College.

CHAPTER FIVE

BELLS RING FOR A BRIDE

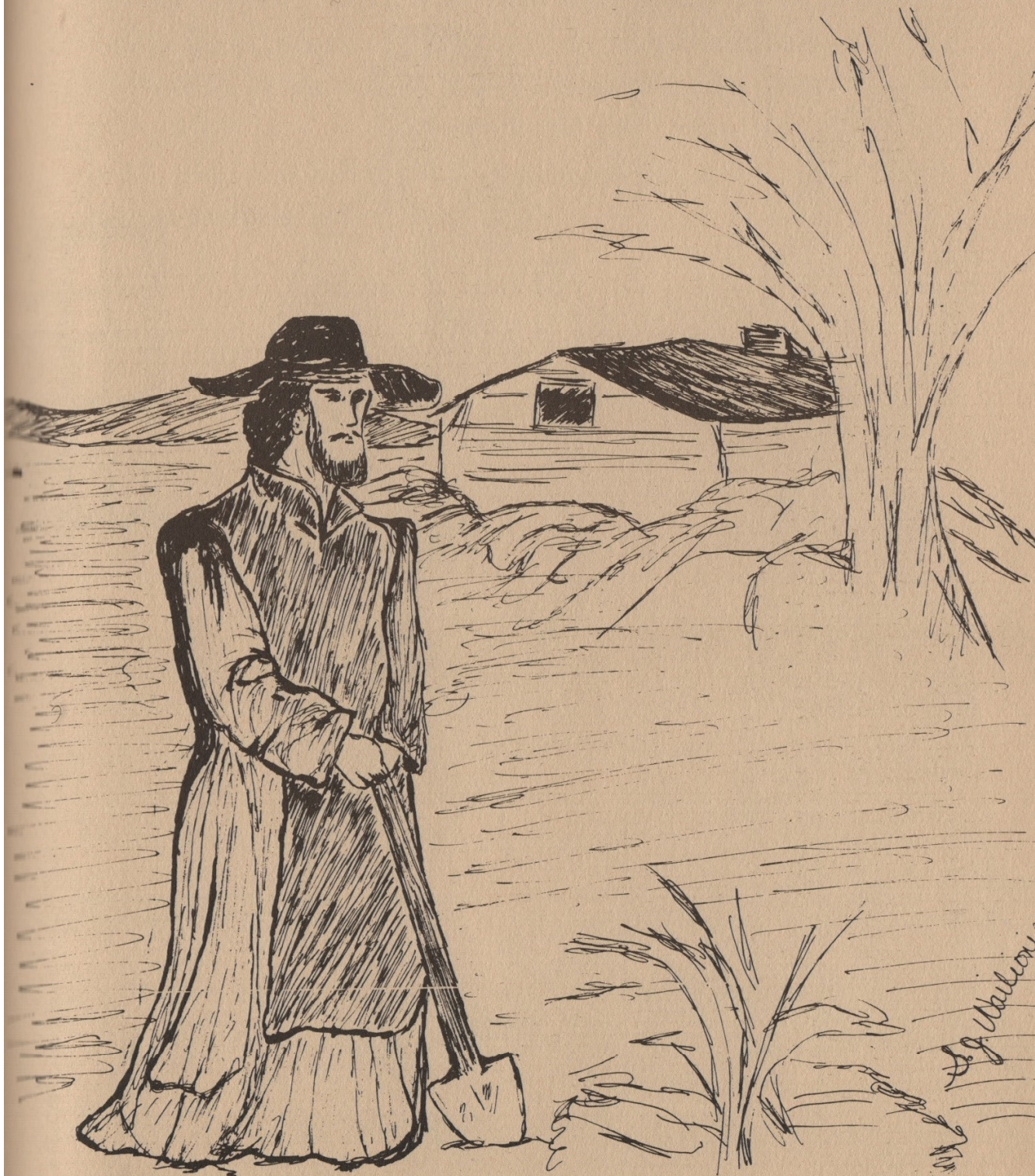
*(As told by Hannah Curtiss in a letter
to her cousin Mary Judson March 11, 1771)*

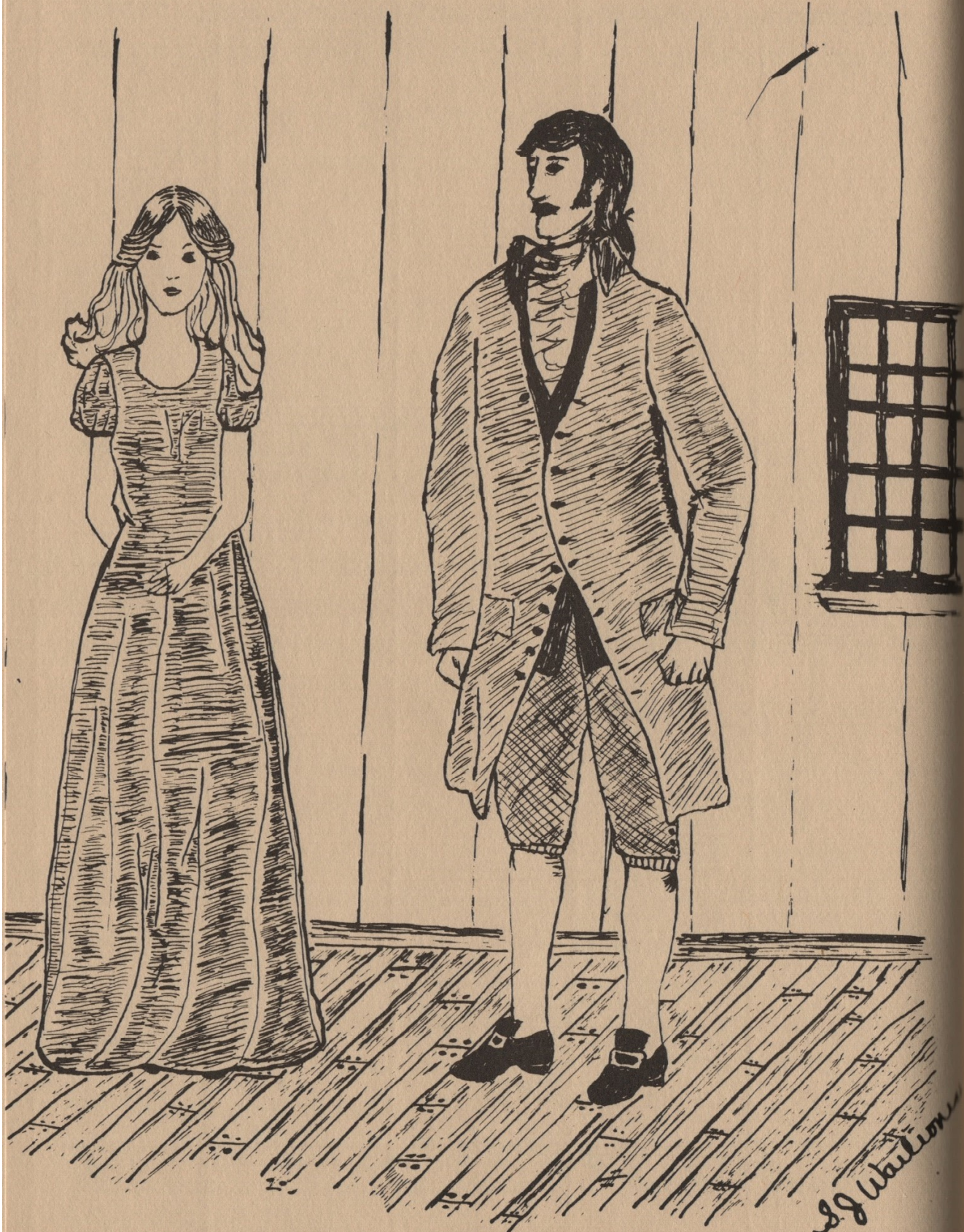
Dear Mary,

How I wish you could have been here for Glorianna's wedding! It was yesterday, and Abby Birdseye stayed with us because we are the same age, and I asked Father, who said it was all right. Then she didn't have to get up so early to make the trip down from Oronoque in the morning. We annoyed Mother by giggling most of the night. When Abby stays with us, though, I always remember the time she came down after the drought. **That** was not a matter to giggle about!

You know the story, don't you? Abby and I were only seven then. It was 1762, and there was no rain at all from the beginning of June until October. Reverend Birdseye's family is very big, you know, and besides, there were all the slaves that lived there, and all his cattle too. All the wells in Oronoque were dry. The river water was no good, for it is salt up there, because of the tide from the sea. The neighbors in the valley helped as long as they could, but they were obliged to stop as their own wells ran lower and lower. Everyone cried, and the slaves moaned and wailed. Abby was frightened to pieces. Everyone thought that they all would die.

Reverend Birdseye prayed and prayed, and then he walked out on his parched land carrying his staff, and kept on praying. Pretty soon, as he walked slowly along, he saw a small dark spot on the earth. He threw himself on the



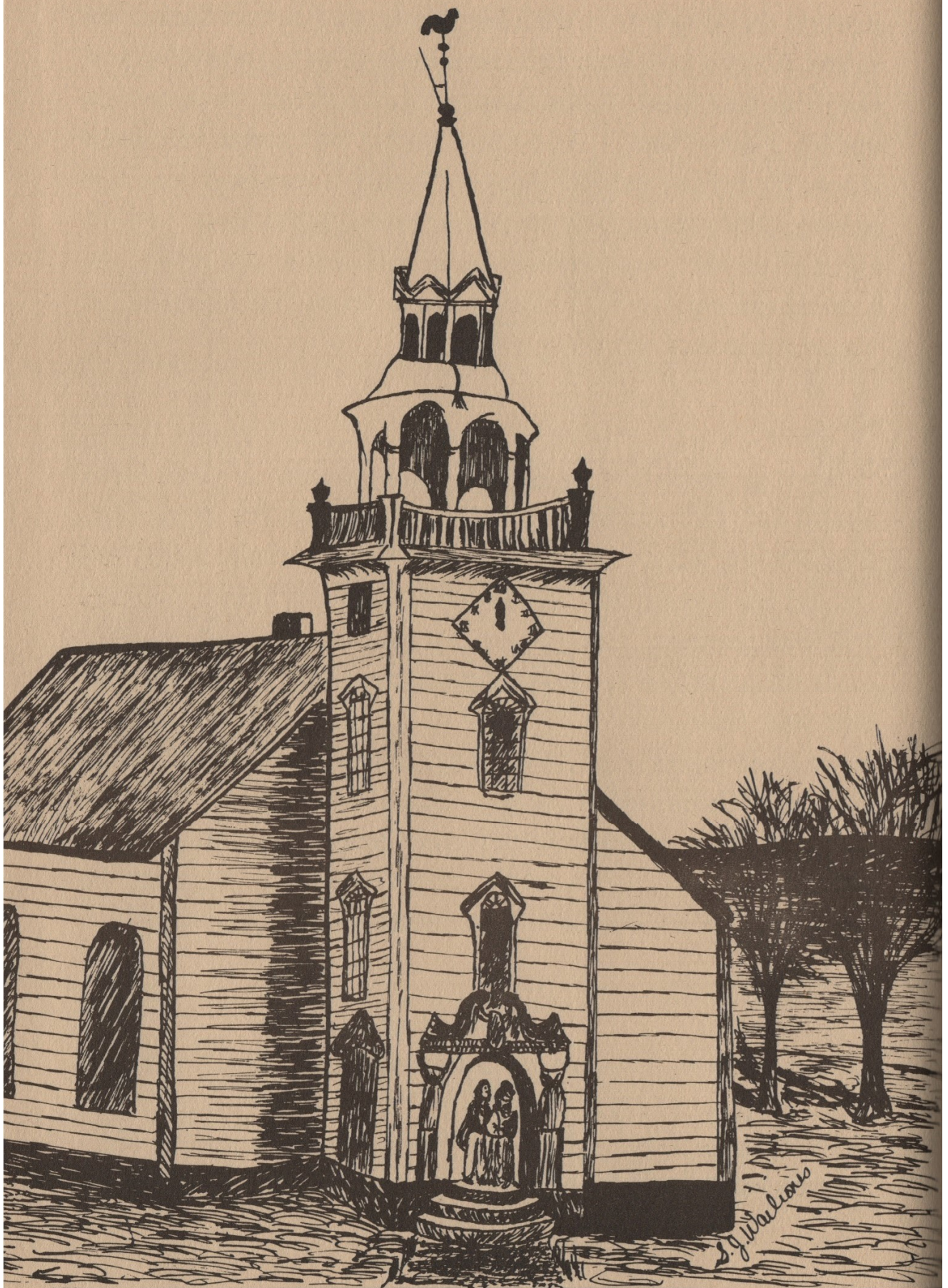


J. J. Watkinson

ground and dug into it with his hands, and it was damp. He called Abby's brothers and the slaves to bring shovels, and they dug like mad. When they got down about three feet, a spring gushed out.¹ And that spring has been full ever since. Everyone calls it Prayer Spring because it was the answer to Reverend Birdseye's prayers. Abby came to visit right after that, and when we said our prayers at night, we kept thanking God for saving them from the drought. It was a miracle.

Getting back to Glorianna — she is only a year older than I am, and she looked so beautiful! Last fall John Stirling, the bridegroom, came to Stratford by stagecoach and stayed at Benjamin's Tavern.² He is very good-looking, and was pleasant and gallant, and all we girls were really excited! It turned out that he is the son of a Scottish baronet and was travelling to see the world, mind you! Imagine having money enough to do that! It was Glorianna that he fell for, with her chestnut hair, big blue eyes, and her cute dimples. Of course her father and Captain Benjamin being friends, it is natural he got to know Glorianna. They say he hung around her father's blacksmith shop³ all winter.

Mrs. Fulsom and Anna⁴ didn't want Glorianna to marry him. They were very upset. Maybe Anna wanted him for herself, since she is older than Glorianna. And maybe Mrs. Fulsom was afraid John would take her daughter to Scotland



and she'd never see her again. Or maybe she thought he wouldn't settle down. But they had a lovely wedding in the end. Think how proud her father must have been that she was married in the very church⁵ for which he did all the iron work. That is why he came to Stratford, you know, and why he built his forge. Of course that was long before Glorianna or I were born. It was back in 1743. He helped Captain Benjamin make the great golden rooster⁶ which is on top of the steeple, too.

Everyone in town was at the service. I wish Dr. Johnson⁷ weren't in England for he'd have loved to be there. He is in England to see about some land that belonged to the Mohegan Indians. He thought he would be back before this, but now he writes my father, who is the same age, that he will be back by fall.

Glorianna and John are going to stay in Stratford. They will live on Elm Street.⁸ John says he is going to teach school. Imagine the son of a baronet teaching school! Some say his father doesn't know of his marriage. Some say that he knows and is angry because Glorianna is only the daughter of a blacksmith, so he won't send John any money. I think John is wonderful to plan to teach. Even if they are going to be very poor, I still think Glorianna is lucky! I can hear the church bells still ringing.

How I wish Uncle David's⁹ parish were here instead of way up there in Newtown! Do try to get him to bring you down soon.

Your cousin,
Hannah

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1. In Oronoque northwest of the Sikorsky Plant
 2. On West Broad Street near Main Street
 3. Southwest corner of Main and West Broad Streets
 4. Glorianna's sister
 5. Christ Episcopal Church
 6. The rooster is still there.
 7. Dr. William Samuel Johnson, son of Rev. Samuel Johnson, was the agent for the Colony with regard to title to land occupied by the Mohegan Indians. He was a member of the Constitutional Convention and made important contributions to the final draft of the Constitution of the United States.
 8. On the east side of Elm Street to the south of Stratford Avenue, in a house known as the Pendleton House, torn down in 1890.
 9. David, who wrote about the tunnel, became a minister. His sister married Hannah's father.

CHAPTER SIX

EVENTS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

*(As told by Phoebe Lewis
to Hannah Curtis in 1780)*

Dear Hannah,

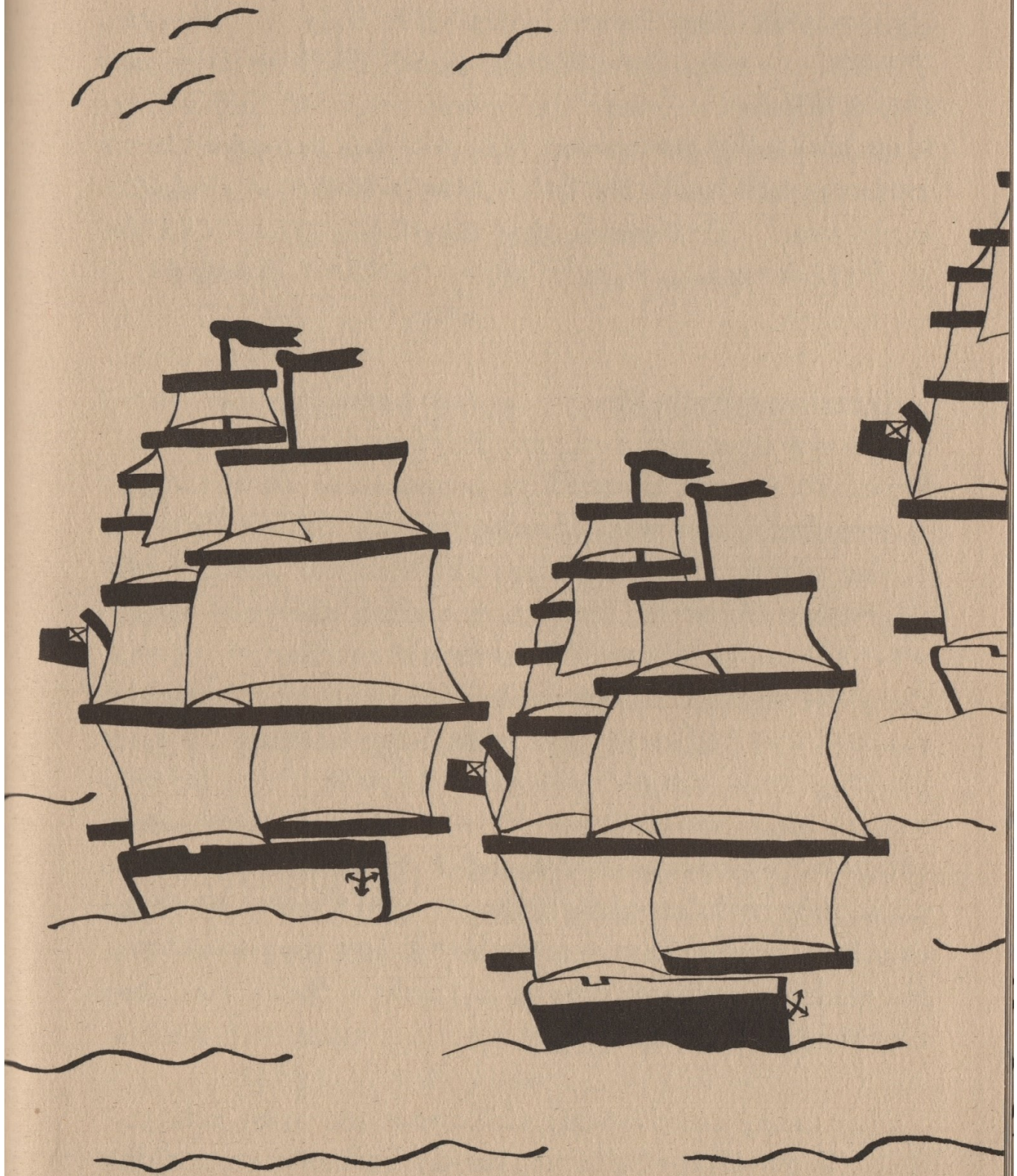
Isn't it exciting that Jabez is back home! He is going to New Haven tomorrow, and I have asked him to leave this letter for you on his way. I never thought the English would let him go, but he got one of his guards to take a letter to Sir Henry Clinton, and he told how he was captured and put in prison. He asked Sir Henry to let him go. It was the answer to a prayer, for Sir Henry gave him an interview. He told Jabe that he didn't know a Colonial could write so well, and Jabe told him how he was a student at Yale when he was captured. Sir Henry released him! Now he says he is going into our army.

Rebecca doesn't want him to. She was so excited when he came home that she actually fainted. Imagine what it would be like to be engaged to a young man and suddenly have him snatched from you, and not know if he would ever come back!

I'll never forget that night when the British broke into our home and took Jabez away. It was May 31 of last year.¹ Mother and I were tired for we had gone to Newfield Point

to see Mrs. John Brooks and to take her some flour from the Old Mill.² It is called the Old Mill because it was the first mill around here. Mrs. Brooks has had such a hard time since her husband died in the smallpox epidemic four years ago. That was such a horrible thing, with over six hundred people ill from it, and so many of them dying! And poor Captain John Brooks was only being kind to prisoners of war exchanged at Stratford Point. When he entertained them on their way home to their families, he had no idea — nor did any of us — that they'd caught the smallpox infection while they were prisoners of the British. What a sad thing!

That was a very sad year, for Zechariah Blakeman and David Wooster and many others were killed. Zechariah, though, was the one who saw the British coming. He was on the hill in Oronoque near his home ploughing a plot of land. His plough hit a root and, exasperated, he stopped to take a breath. As he did so he chanced to look out over the river toward the Sound. To his surprise he saw British ships coming toward the Connecticut shore.³ He ran from the field, got his gun, and saddled his horse. Before he left, though, he told his slaves to bury the chairs that had belonged to his father and as many other valuables as they could, for General Tryon⁴ had been coming through Connecticut burning all the houses and goods of the colonists, and Zechariah wanted to save what he could.⁵ Then he rode through the town sounding the alarm. All those who could followed him to Fairfield to engage the enemy. But poor Zechariah was killed in that battle.



David Wooster was born in Stratford, but he got to be a famous general and he traveled everywhere — Montreal, Philadelphia, New Haven — trying to help win the war. The British went from Compo Beach to Ridgefield, and that is where General Wooster was wounded. A few days later he died of the wound. The war has caused so much suffering, but it was the fault of the British that we had to declare our independence that fourth of July in 1776, for they didn't treat us right at all, as you know. It was not to be endured.

But the night the British came to our house I was, like I said, very tired and I was dead asleep. The boys weren't here, for they're married now and were in their own homes, but Jabez was, because he was visiting Rebecca, having just finished his exams at Yale. It was Jabez, mother, Father, Rebecca, Mary Anne and I, all sound asleep, when there was this awful pounding at the door in the middle of the night. The door crashed in, and a party of British soldiers who had come over from Long Island were upon us. They took everything — the food we'd stored for winter, the quilts and blankets into which they dumped everything that was in our chests, and even our clothing. Worst of all, they took Jabez. My father begged them to leave the Continental bills they found in his till, but they would not. He said they wouldn't be any good to them, but they laughed and told him they'd use them to start a bonfire.

I lay in my trundle-bed⁶ and pretended to be asleep. I didn't know what else to do, for we all knew we couldn't save Jabez. But, when I peeked to see what was happening,

I saw the roll of wool I'd spun and had dyed dark blue, ready to be woven. It was my first spinning job and I'd worked hours and hours on it all through the winter. And I was only twelve then, too! A soldier had just tossed it onto the pile of stuff they were going to take. I couldn't stand it. I reached out quickly as they turned to fetch something else, and I stuffed it underneath me in my bed. They didn't notice, and they went away without it. I told Jabez I'd rather it had been he, but I will make Rebecca and him something out of it when they marry.

In the morning the neighbors came in with food and blankets for us. It was a long time before we could make up the supplies we had lost in that raid! I knew, though, that with a man like General George Washington as Commander-in-Chief, those Britishers would be paid back. I went all the way to the river⁷ to be at the ferry the day he crossed on his way from Philadelphia to Boston to become the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, for I knew I wouldn't miss him that way. There were a lot of people waiting on the riverbank. Rebecca and I got there in the morning, and he didn't come until afternoon. How wonderful he looked in his uniform sitting so tall and straight on his white horse!⁸ He had lots of people with him, military escorts and some of his friends, but even so he took time out to wave and smile at Becky and me. We waved back so hard that our hands hurt! I was only eight then, and it was a long walk from Old Mill Green. It was June 28, 1775, because I wrote it down so I wouldn't forget.

I went with Father to the blacksmith shop the other day,



for Beauty had thrown a shoe. While we were waiting for the shoeing, Mr. Fulsom told Father that he was glad John Stirling sent for Glorianna and their two little girls to go to Scotland. He wishes his wife had allowed Anna to go too, but she made a big fuss about not wanting to lose another daughter. You were lucky to go to that wedding. People still talk about it. I wish I were a grown lady like you, but people say I will be soon enough. But I'm only thirteen, and you are twenty-five. It takes **such** a long time to grow up!

Since you are not George Washington, I do not feel like walking so far today, so am sending my love with this by Jabez.

Your Friend,
Phoebe Lewis

1. One source says Jabez Tomlinson was a prisoner two years, but he was captured May 31, 1779 and was appointed an Ensign in Colonel Webb's Contintal Regiment April 3, 1780. so the time must have been shorter.
2. Old Mill was east of Old Mill Green.
3. The story handed down by tradition claims that the ships could be seen from Oronoque. Lacking smog and obstructions, it is possible.
4. A British general
5. The feared burning did not occur in Stratford. The chairs were retrieved and are now the property of Velmore B. Spamer. They are approximately 225 years old.
6. A low rope bed which fit under a full-size bed when not occupied.
7. The Housatonic
8. Washington crossed the river on the ferry at Stratford at least seven different times. On Sept. 19, 1780 General Lafayette crossed on the ferry to meet Washington at Benjamin's Tavern.

About the author . . .

Mrs. Spamer has a deep pride in Stratford and its past. She is a direct descendant of Elizabeth Curtiss, a first settler of Stratford, and her husband, Velmore Blakeman Spamer, is a direct descendant of Reverend Adam Blakeman, leader of the first settlers in Stratford. Both are members of the Stratford Historical Society, Mr. Spamer being a past president. Their home on Paradise Green, built in 1770, has been in the Curtiss family since it was built. As a child, Mrs. Spamer recalls visiting her grandmother's cousins, Cousin Celia and Cousin Cornelia, who lived in the house now known as Judson House. They left their home to be used as the home of the Stratford Historical Society, which it remains today.

Currently a teacher-counselor at Stratford High School, Mrs. Spamer has also taught elementary and junior high school as well as Adult Education creative writing. She has written numerous plays for **Plays, Inc.**, published by the Atlantic Monthly Press and her work has also appeared in **Grade Teacher** and **The Instructor**, two professional magazines for teachers.

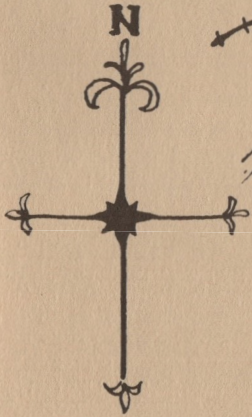
Mrs. Spamer's dedication and love for both Stratford and children is evident in her work. Keeping in mind the interests of younger readers, she has tried to give them a picture of their town's "way of life" in colonial days.

ILLUSTRATION CREDITS

Nancy Blowers, Lordship School	Ch. 3
Marie Camillo, Bunnell High School	Maps
David Crader, Stratford High School	Ch. 4
Cynthia D'Amato, Wooster Junior High School	Ch. 6
Lanae Handy, Wooster Junior High School	Ch. 2
Keith Lambert, Johnson Junior High School	Book Jacket
Leonard Rosati, Garden School	Ch. 3
Sue Wailionis, Flood Junior High School	Ch. 5
Larry Wilson, Stratford High School	Ch. 1

STRATFORD, CONNECTICUT

1976



KEY

- 1 Town Hall
- 2 Railroad Station
- 3 First Congregational Church
- 4 Sterling House
- 5 Stratford Library
- 6 St. James Church
- 7 Episcopal burial ground
- 8 Christ Episcopal Church
- 9 Judson House
- 10 Shakespeare Theatre

