

# The Ira Farnham Papers

By Russell C. Farnham, C.G.

On a recent visit to a popular Internet genealogical forum I noticed that items purporting to belong to Ira Farnham of Acton, Maine were being offered for auction on the popular *eBay* site. I wasted no time in going to that site, and after reviewing the description of items being offered, was determined to acquire them. They were found during a recent real estate transaction in Acton of a home that was not owned by a Farnham. My bid was successful for the following ten items:

1. Ledger, measuring 8" x 6 ½," detailing various trading transactions
2. Ledger, measuring 3¾" x 5¾," also containing trading transactions
3. Original deed from Charlotte Wentworth to Paul Farnham of Shapleigh, Maine (York Co. Deed: 132:2)
4. Original deed from Dexter F. Corson of Augusta to Ira Farnham (YD:204:568)
5. Original deed from Isariah Doore to N. Jewett witnessed by Paul Farnham (YD:62:93 *sic*)
6. Original deed from James Berry, Richard Doore, and Selina Doore to Ira Farnham (YD 146:46)
7. Original deed from Aaron Hubbard to Paul Farnham of Shapleigh (YD: 112:135)
8. Original deed from Paul Farnham to his son Ira Farnham (YD: 187:232)
9. Original deed from Daniel L. Farnham to Ira Farnham (YD: 240:171)
10. Original maintenance deed from Ira and Sally Farnham to daughter, Ellen F. Wiggin (YD:384:50)

Being familiar with the families of Shapleigh and Acton [especially Farnhams], I was thrilled to bid for and acquire these documents, as there was never any doubt of their genealogical interest. My recollection is that the description on the *eBay* site identified the group of papers as "documents and journals," possibly belonging at one time to Ira Farnham. As most of the documents were original land deeds, I considered the fact that as with all land transactions in this era, the original deed was taken to the county registrar of deeds. He would then copy it for his records, and enter it into county records by book and page, noting the names of the grantor and grantee. Generally the buyer retained the original deed. After receiving these papers I noted that all of the deeds contained proper notations confirming that they had been recorded in York County. So there was never a question if they contained *unrecorded* transactions of any significance.

The maintenance deed (York Co. Deed 384:50) had special interest for me because it was a deed I did not review or abstract in my book, *The New England Descendants of the Immigrant, Ralph Farnum of Rochester, Kent County England and Ipswich, Massachusetts* (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E. Randall, publisher, 1999).

But the ledgers of Ira Farnham also yielded interesting information. The entries concerned numerous trades (payments) of goods, while offering a window into mid-nineteenth-century life at Acton. However, the entries do not always clearly indicate if Ira Farnham was the creditor or debtor. They appear to show monies that were owed to him, while recording work done by debtors to pay off the debts, but which could also be payments made by Ira to satisfy his debts.

The smaller ledger consists of a light blue cover and eight interior pages, held together in the center by thread. The entries in this smaller ledger concern only John Farnham, David Horn, and Nathaniel Jewett. A sample page of the ledger follows:

Nathaniel Jewett Dr		To Ira Farnham	
1838	March 31	one day hauling logs one hand and four cattle 10/	1 67
	32	one days hauling logs with one hand	1 67
	33	one days hauling logs one hand and four cattle 10/	1 67
	34	one days hauling logs with one hand and four cattle 10/	1 67
1839	August 29	two days mowing found our selves	1 67
1840	January 15	one days logging from Horns mill one hand and four cattle	1 25
1840	Jan 16	one days hauling logs from Horns mill with one hand and four cattle	1 25
	17	one days hauling logs from Horns mill with one hand and four cattle	1 25
	21	one days hauling logs one hand and four cattle	1 25
	22	one days hauling logs from yellow mill one hand and four cattle	1 25
	March 24	to ten hours of a day hauling wood one hand and four cattle	1 00
	April 15	one day work from May 1st	67
	2	one days mowing one hand and four cattle	1 25

Page from the ledger of Ira Farnham

[Click image for enlarged view](#)

In this image, the notation “Dr,” (debtor?) is visible in the upper right corner of the left page. The left side would appear to list debts that were incurred by Nathaniel Jewett (i.e., Ira’s accounts receivables). The first entry shows that Ira worked one day on March 4, 1838, “hauling logs one hand and four cattle” [10 hours], and earning \$1.67. This was probably not work done personally by Ira, but by his farmhand, using oxen belonging to Ira. This work took place over four consecutive days. Ira’s next entry on his account with Jewett was recorded over a year later on August 29, 1839. On this date he charged the same \$1.67, but this time for “two days mowing found our selves.” This probably meant Ira did the mowing himself. The following year, on January 15, 1840, he charged \$1.25 for “one days logging from Horns mill one hand and four cattle.”

The right side of the ledger is titled “To Ira Farnham” and contains similar entries.

The larger ledger is a manufactured booklet containing interior pages of horizontally lined paper. The dark brown hard cover and endpapers are bound together with glued endpapers. Some pages have been removed with a razor or other sharp instrument. A sample page is below.

1848		deb
April	1 by 1/2 dozen butter & flour	3 00
"	" by one pair thick boots	6 00
May	3 by one hundred & ten and three fourths pounds fish at 30 cents per pound	8 65
June	6 by four pounds sugar	6 80
"	" by one butter per lb	6 80
"	13 by one frame sheep shears	12 50
"	22 by 7 1/2 pounds fish at 30 cents per lb	7 50
Sept	1 by one gallon molasses	7 00
"	12 by 9 pounds salt fish at 40 cents per pound	5 40
"	17 by 1/2 pounds cotton yarn at 20 cents per lb	1 25
Nov	" by one gallon molasses	7 00
"	" by ten and 3/4 pounds salt fish	6 80
"	17 by one yard molton cloth	1 00
"	" by two hanks linen thread	1 00
Dec	19 by nine yards linen thread	2 25
1849	25 cents from yard	2 25
January	27 by 1/2 yard blue cloth at 30 cents per yard	8 00
Feb	6 by two gallons molasses 30 cents per gallon	1 40
"	" by one gallon molasses	7 00
"	" by one pound sugar 12 molasses	7 00
Total		27 40

Page from the ledger of Ira Farnham

[Click image for enlarged view](#)

Individuals named in this larger ledger included:

N. P. Gerrish  
 Nathaniel Ham  
 Benjamin Horn  
 Nathaniel Horn  
 “Winthrop” M. Horne

Samuel J. Hunt  
widow Ann Jewett  
Elias "Millar"  
"Ebinezzer" Osgood  
Alva Runnels  
Nathaniel Rines  
John Row  
John G. Sanborn  
Joshua B. Sanborn  
George "Stacpole"  
R. P. Tebbetts  
Lyman Willey  
James Willey  
Aaron Witham  
Mark N. Wiggin

Considering that "Asa Fox & Son" and Ira Farnham purchased or paid for a vast array of goods such as fish, boots, sugar, butter, shears, "mollases," cloth, "hanks linen thred," eggs, peas, "Baldwin apples," "peare stockins," plug of tobacco, shingle nails, 10 penny nail, bushel salt, seven yards ticking at 35 cents per yard, tea, etc., it would be fair to say they were both "traders." In census and other records, Ira is usually listed as a farmer. But some of these documents also record him as a shoemaker and a millwright.

On a separate piece of paper inserted between the pages of the ledger I found a note with "Maine Side" written across the top, and the following names written below it:

Mrs. W. S. Miller  
Mrs. Wm. Pinfold  
Mrs. James Merrone  
Mrs. Frank Hurd  
Mrs. \_ Hill  
Mrs. C. S. Lowed [and]  
Mrs. S. Lowed

On the other side was written "N.H. Side," with the following names:

Mrs. Frank Goodgins  
Mrs. \_ Day  
Mrs. C. H. Prescott  
Mrs. Chas. Fox  
Mrs. B. W. Simez [sic]  
Mrs. Fred Simer  
Mrs. A. A. Fox  
Mrs. O. F. Marsh  
Mrs. John Simes  
Mrs. F. G. Furlong  
Mrs. Daniel Murray  
Mrs. W. F. Cutts  
Mrs. A. B. Shaw  
Mrs. Orange Wentworth  
Mrs. John Applebee  
Mrs. Daniel Philbrick  
Mrs. Henry Philbrick

This apparently was a list of customers who routinely purchased provisions and goods from Ira.

Especially noteworthy is the fact that Ira recorded debts owed to him by the young men who married three of his four daughters. Hannah was second spouse of Nathaniel Ham; Ellen, who was the beneficiary of Ira's homestead as seen below in his maintenance deed, was married to Mark N. Wiggin; and Sarah was the first spouse of Josiah W. Witham.<sup>[1]</sup> Elizabeth, the second oldest daughter, never married and died at Acton, June 20, 1916, at age 82y, 2m, 19d.<sup>[2]</sup>

I wanted to learn more of Asa Fox and also wished to follow these families a bit further. I consulted the census and the recently published *Early Families of Shapleigh and Acton, Maine* (Frederick Boyle, Peter E Randall, Publisher, Portsmouth, NH, 2002). Asa was listed as a "trader" in the 1850 census, residing in Milton, New Hampshire.<sup>[3]</sup> His family composition was:

**Asa Fox**, age 39 [sic], trader, with \$2000 of real estate, born Maine

**Harriett W. Fox**, wife, age 40, born [Shapleigh] Maine She was daughter of Enoch and Dorothy [Heard] Wood,<sup>[4]</sup> and was formerly married to a Plummer <sup>[5]</sup>

**Charles D. Fox**, age 16, carpenter, born New Hampshire

**Enoch E. W. [sic Elbridge W.] Fox**, age 15, trader, born New Hampshire, who apparently dropped "Enoch" in his adult life

**Asa A. Fox** age 13, born New Hampshire

Asa Fox was born October 23, 1809, the son of Daniel and Mary (Roberts) Fox, and died in Milton, New Hampshire, on September 29, 1887, at age 77y, 11m, 23d,<sup>[6]</sup> where he is buried with his wife and a number of children.

Ira Farnham is found as "farmer" at the same 1850 census, residing nearby at Acton, Maine.<sup>[7]</sup> His family composition is as follows:

**Ira Farnham**, age 45, farmer, \$1,500 worth of real estate, born Maine

**Sally Farnham**, wife, age 45

**Hannah Farnham**, age 21

**Elizabeth Farnham**, age 16

**Ellen Farnham**, age 11

**Sarah Farnham**, age 5

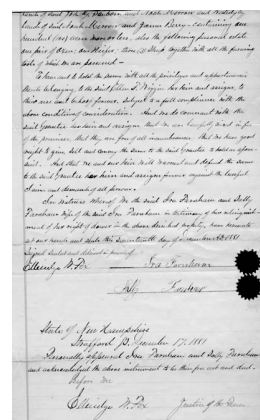
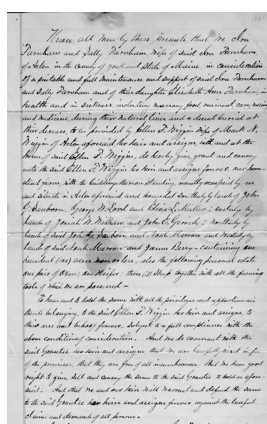
Living next door to Ira in 1850 was his widowed mother, Olive Farnham, age 84, who was living alone in her own home.

I went back to the census to try and locate Ira's son-in-law [Sarah's husband] Josiah W. Witham, but found that was not so simple owing to the multiple individuals found with that name. In 1850 there were two persons named Josiah Witham residing in Milton, New Hampshire, both in their thirties, and [coincidentally] one with a wife named Sarah.<sup>[8]</sup> But that census was of no help as Sarah and Josiah did not marry until 1867. Moreover, Josiah was mourning the loss of Sarah who died April 14<sup>th</sup> of that same year, surely from complications at the birth of son Clarence A. Witham in March, who himself later died in July.<sup>[9]</sup> According to Boyle, Josiah was residing that year in nearby Wakefield,<sup>[10]</sup> but a review of that census failed to locate him. His two-year-old son, Ira Farnham Witham, was living with his grandfather Ira Farnham at the time.

The maintenance deed written by Ira and his wife Sally is a common document that specified that daughter Ellen Wiggin was to provide care for them, as well as their daughter Elizabeth Ann Farnham, for the rest of their natural lives. Elizabeth was a spinster with no handicap noted in the census records. The deed specifies that Ellen would provide them with nursing care, medicine, food and shelter, and a decent burial. In return, Ellen was to receive the homestead, which sat on a hundred acres in Acton, and all other buildings thereon. The acreage was described as bounded by John G. Sanborn, George N. Lord, Elias L. Miller, Josiah W. Witham, John E. Gerrish, Noah Merrow, and James Berry. Ira's personal estate, including a pair of oxen, one heifer, three sheep, and farming tools were part of the stipulation, which was signed by Ira and Sally before Elbridge N. Fox, Justice of the Peace, on December 17, 1881. Coincidentally, Elbridge Fox was born December 3, 1834, the son of the trader Asa and Harriett (Wood) Fox. Because of the markings on this deed ("return to E.W. Fox"), I have suspicion he may have been the repository for all of these original deeds and documents that were auctioned. I noted earlier that Elbridge was enumerated at the 1850 census as

“Enoch E.W. Fox.” Apparently he did not use “Enoch” during his adult life, however, I have not confirmed if this was consistent with his name as shown on an original birth record.

The original maintenance deed is shown below:



*Ira and Sally Farnham's maintenance deed*

*Click image for enlarged view*

[1] Frederick Boyle, *Early Families of Shapleigh and Acton, Maine*: pg 136.

[2] Ibid, citing Acton vital records.

[3] 1850 U.S. Census, population schedule, New Hampshire, Strafford County, town of Milton, dwelling 19, family 19, pg 106, disk 4, CD454, Family Tree Maker.

[4] Frederick Boyle, *Early Families of Shapleigh and Acton, Maine*: pg 158.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Frederick Boyle, *Early Families of Shapleigh and Acton, Maine* (Portsmouth, NH: Peter E Randall, Publisher, 2002), pg 136.

[7] 1850 U S census, population schedule, Maine, York County, town of Acton, dwelling 189, family 189, disk 3, CD454, Family Tree Maker.

[8] 1850 U S census, population schedule, New Hampshire, Strafford County, town of Milton, dwelling 8, family 8, pg 105, disk 4, CD454, Family Tree Maker, family of Josiah N Witham.

[9] Frederick Boyle, *Early Families of Shapleigh and Acton, Maine*: pg 758.

[10] Ibid.