

EPSOM'S TOWN POUND AND TRAMP HOUSE

The first mention of a town pound was in March of 1788 when Francis Locke was selected as pound keeper. The pound was near the parsonage, and in 1795, at town meeting it was voted "that any person or persons may move the pound in Epsom further back on the parsonage lot so that the front thereof may stand parallel with the wall back of the schoolhouse, provide it be placed and underpinned as well as it is now and without any expense to the town." It remained at this location, still with Francis Locke as pound keeper until 1808, when in the town warrant it was asked "to see what method the town will adopt to erect a pound for the use of said town." It was voted that a pound be erected on Capt. Samuel Locke's land near the house of Reuben Locke, lately occupied, on the turnpike road; that the pound for the use of the town be built of stone, thirty five feet square within side at the bottom and four feet thick at the bottom; and two feet at the top, and six feet high of stone with a cap of yellow pine 8 inches by 10 inches free of sap; that the building of the pound be set up by the Selectmen at public auction to the lowest bidder. This site was down near what was later Knowle's store, on the new turnpike road, which bypassed the older route up Center Hill to get to the coast. The town center was shifting, and the property owner, Samuel Locke, was elected pound keeper. Samuel Locke was one of several tavern/store owners in the area, another was John Batchelder, who was pound keeper in 1810. The job returned to Samuel Locke who held it until his sudden death in 1816, and in 1817 it was held by his son Daniel Evans Locke. By 1820 Abel Brown assumed the duties of that office, followed by John Ham Jr. for two years before Mr. Brown once again took over its upkeep for the next several years.

Town reports and records lapse, and the next mention of the town pound was in June of 1876, when Andrew S. Evans, who lived not far from the pound, wrote to the Selectmen – "I hereby notify you that the pound in this town had been and is now out of repair. I therefore hereby request you to put it in repair in accordance with the law of this State. If this request is not complied with I intend to bring suit against the town."

The resolution of the matter is unknown.

It is not exactly known when the town started to pay expenses for transients and tramps through town. Budgets from the mid 1880's already show that individuals in town were paid a dollar for the care of each tramp – with the Chesley Brothers in one year receiving \$57 dollars. The care for tramps and the fate of the town pound coincide in 1902, as this article from the early 1940's in the Union shows, and completes our history of each.

Epsom Tramp House at Epsom Has New Location

"Special to the Union. Epsom, Aug. 21. – The Epsom tramp house is one of the first victims of the construction project on the Concord-Dover road, Route 9, being built through the town. The tramp house was situated directly in the path of the new road, as it straightens out to cut off a curve east of the Epsom Post office.

The building was loaded onto a trailer truck, and the movers planned to set it down in a nearby field. However, the owner of the land put up a vigorous protest, and the tramp house moved on. After making various attempts to find a situation for the wandering tramp house, it finally came to rest nearly three miles nearer Concord, on town land west of the Four Corners.



The tramp house was built in 1902 by Jackson C. Philbrick, father of M.C. Philbrick, Epsom's veteran town clerk. The decision to have a town shelter for tramps came after a stormy session at the town meeting when some objected because the town had paid \$60 to local factotums for feeding and lodging 60 itinerants the previous year. The building was erected on the site of the old town pound, using the stone wall for a foundation. The total cost was \$96.32. The stove came from the old Congregational church which formerly stood at Epsom. The house was fitted

with bunks, and was otherwise comfortably equipped.

However, the knights of the road showed their appreciation by stealing the bed clothing and breaking up the bunks for fuel. After various efforts were given to furnish the building, efforts were given up and now the paraphernalia includes the stove, a pile of cordwood and a saw. Those who wish to keep warm have the privilege of sawing up the cordwood for their use.

Many of the tramps make regular stops at the Epsom tramp house, returning at intervals to take advantage of the town's hospitality. It was formerly the custom to furnish each visitor with a loaf of bread and a can of beans; and sometimes some other supplies were included. One man always called for dried apricots and canned heat to cook them with. At present each tramp receives a loaf of bread and an invitation to move on in the morning.

The year 1937 was a banner one for tramps, as 455 of them were given a night's lodging and a breakfast at a cost to the town of \$182. In 1940 the expense was less than half of this figure. Many of the younger men who were unemployed because of actual scarcity of paying work are no longer on the road, but the old timers make the usual rounds. One of them called this week at the general store near the former location of the tramp house and said wistfully "Well, I see the old hotel has gone!"