

THE JACKSONS AND THEIR  
HOMESTEAD  
IN  
NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## CREDITS

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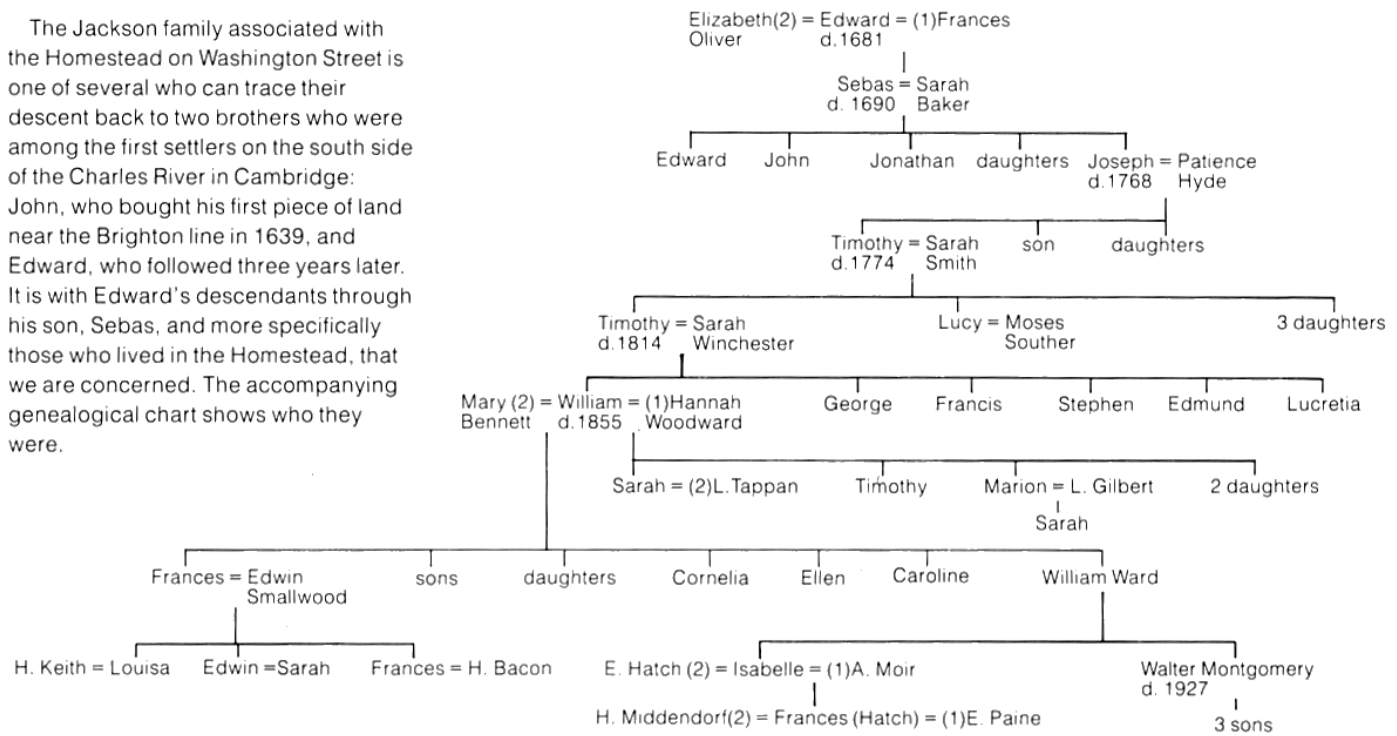
Published in conjunction with the exhibitions celebrating the one hundred seventy-fifth anniversary of the house, and its thirty-five years as the city museum.

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Duscha S. Scott, Director



### INTRODUCTION

The Jackson family associated with the Homestead on Washington Street is one of several who can trace their descent back to two brothers who were among the first settlers on the south side of the Charles River in Cambridge: John, who bought his first piece of land near the Brighton line in 1639, and Edward, who followed three years later. It is with Edward's descendants through his son, Sebas, and more specifically those who lived in the Homestead, that we are concerned. The accompanying genealogical chart shows who they were.



## THE JACKSONS

### Edward (1602-1681)

Edward was born in the East End of London and, like his father before him, was a nail-maker. He amassed a substantial fortune so that soon after arriving in New England he was able to buy a house with several acres of land in Newton Corner. This was the first of many transactions that would, in time, make him the largest landowner in Newton.

He was admitted as a Freeman in 1645, became a Cambridge Proprietor and, almost immediately, became involved in the civil and religious life of both colony and town.

For nearly two decades Edward was Deputy to the General Court where he served on various committees, many of them charged with surveying and laying out new settlements. Among these was Natick, established by John Eliot for the Praying Indians. He was a Commissioner for Small Causes for Middlesex County, held a number of responsible town offices, and was frequently called upon to lay out new highways.

When, by about 1654, the dozen or so families living south of the river, tired of the long journey to the Cambridge meeting house, started holding their own services, they probably met in the new mansion house Edward had built near the Brighton line. This was the beginning of the movement for the separation of Newton from Cambridge in which Edward later played a leading part. He died before the town achieved complete political independence.

In addition, he found time to accompany John Eliot to Waban's wigwam at nearby Nonantum and recorded the questions of the Indians and Eliot's answers.

Edward was married twice: to Frances, who apparently died shortly after they arrived, and to the widow Elizabeth Oliver who is said to have been present at every local birth for fifty years, earning herself the title of Mother of the Village.

Edward gave much of his property to his children during his life time. Among these gifts, which were confirmed in his

will, was one of a house and 150 acres to his son Sebas.

### Sebas (1642-1690)

Sebas was Edward's last child by Frances, and is said to have been born on the journey out, hence his name, a corruption of "Seaborn". Not much is known about him. He did his share of town duties, serving as hogreeve and constable and, the year before he died, as surveyor of highways. Although his father left a substantial library, Sebas does not seem to have been able to sign his name.

In 1671 he married Sarah Baker of Roxbury, and it was probably then that he moved into the house that Edward had built for him. When Sebas died, his son Edward, the only child who was of age, received sixty acres on the western side of the farm where he built his house, while Sarah remained in the homestead with the five minor children.

## THE HOMESTEAD

In 1646 Edward bought a 500-acre farm which covered much of Newton Corner and Newtonville. Before building his permanent home near the Brighton line, he probably lived in the existing farmhouse which stood on the County Road, west of Smelt Brook (where Our Lady's Church is now). In about 1670 he built another house on the opposite side of the brook, on the site of the present Homestead. This, with 150 acres, he gave to Sebas.

The house, which faced south, was a saltbox: two stories in front and one at the back. Originally twenty-two feet long by eighteen wide, seventeen feet were added to the length either by Sebas or, later, by his son Joseph. As was not uncommon, there were always two generations living in the house, and the addition was probably to provide for a second family. There were two kitchens and a bedroom on the lower floor, two chambers on the second, and two further bedrooms in the attic. The house,



**The old house as drawn by Ellen Jackson (1825-1902) in 1894.**

which was never painted either inside or out, took its water from a well sheltered by a large elm tree.

## THE JACKSONS

### Joseph (1690-1768)

Joseph was born a few months before Sebas died, and for seventeen years lived in the house with his mother, Sarah, and those of his siblings who were as yet unmarried. After he came of age, his father's estate was finally divided among the brothers and sisters, their mother agreeing to give up her right to the property in return for their financial support. Joseph took the homestead, married Patience Hyde and became a clothier. For many years, however, a great deal of his time was spent representing himself, his mother, and his sisters in litigation with his brother, Edward, over the estate of brother Jonathan who failed to return from a logging expedition to the Gulf of Mexico. The bitterness engendered by this contest had hardly subsided when, in 1726, Sarah's death led to renewed legal battles over her estate. By the time all was settled Joseph was so familiar with the courts and the law, that he was able to represent the town in its suit against Cambridge over support for the Great Bridge over the Charles River.

Apart from this, he was only moderately active in town affairs. The farm seems to have been well run and he was famous locally for the honey he presented annually to his friends and to the minister, John Cotton.

Towards the end of his life Joseph became too lame to walk and was forced to sit in a specially made chair when cutting wood, hoeing weeds or performing other tasks on the farm. A century later, the chair was celebrated in verse by his great-great-granddaughter, Marion (Jackson) Gilbert, and is still displayed at the Jackson Homestead.

### Lieutenant Timothy (1726-1774)

In 1750 Joseph gave the eastern end of the house to his elder son, Timothy, who lived there with his wife, Sarah (Smith), from the time of their marriage in 1752. Joseph and Patience remained in the western half until he died, after which she lived there alone.

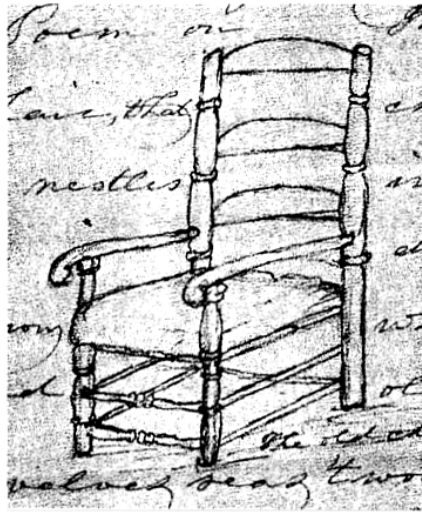
Under the terms of Joseph's will and the subsequent agreement made by the heirs, Timothy became responsible for all Joseph's debts, undertook to make cash payments to his mother and sisters, and in return would receive all the real estate when his mother died. As it happened she outlived him by a year, and he never managed to bring his financial affairs under control. When he died in 1774 the estate was insolvent. Sarah used a legacy from her father to liquidate the debts and for many years worked on the farm with her children.

Timothy fought in the French Wars during which he rose to the rank of Lieutenant. He also held various mid-level town offices and served on a number of committees. His grandson, Francis, describes him as "not a man of much energy or decision of character", but maybe the burdens he assumed and the consumption which killed him at forty-eight were partly to blame. He died intestate.



## THE HOMESTEAD

Sebas knew that his farm would be divided among his sons, but inserted a clause in his will designed, at least, to keep the land in the family. However, only Edward's portion remained intact. John moved to Connecticut and disposed of his share, and Jonathan's estate was sold (Edward acquiring some of it). Joseph was forced to sell a number of acres to his neighbors to pay his debts, so that by the time he died only about thirty acres remained with the Homestead.



Joseph's chair, drawn by Ellen.

In 1750 Joseph gave half the house and one and a half acres of land to his elder son, Timothy. The other half was to remain the property of his widow, Patience, during her lifetime. Timothy's inventory lists nine acres north of the County Road, twenty-one to the south.

## THE JACKSONS

### Major Timothy (1756-1814)

A year after Lieutenant Timothy died, Sarah and her daughters were left to care for the farm while young Timothy went off to fight in the War of the Revolution. Off and on, he was away for five years. Timothy was at Lexington in April 1775. The following year he shipped out of Salem on a privateer and was involved in a series of adventures during which, as recounted to his children, he was called upon to display great physical courage, resourcefulness, and qualities of leadership. Unlike many others, he returned "unbroken in constitution and character", was warmly welcomed by his family, and promptly left again for Rhode Island.

When Timothy came home for good in 1780, his father's estate was finally settled, probably at the prompting of his brother-in-law, Moses Souther, who, married to Lucy (after whom a local D.A.R. Chapter is named) had worked on the farm in Timothy's absence. Timothy got two thirds of the homestead and all the real estate, and in return he

assumed all the remaining debts and supported his sisters. He worked hard on the farm for the next eight years or so, also spending two of them teaching in the local school, but it was his appointment as deputy sheriff of Middlesex County in 1791 that put him on the road to financial stability. By 1802 he was able, with others, to start a soap



**Francis (1789-1861), Timothy's third son, who wrote *The History of Newton* published in 1854.**

and candle factory in Boston, and it was the success of this venture that put the family finances on a firm footing for years to come.

Meanwhile he became more and more involved in public affairs: appointed Brigade Major in the Middlesex Brigade in 1793, he became a Justice of the Peace shortly thereafter and served as State Representative from 1797 until shortly before his death. He also ran unsuccessfully for Congress. At the same time he was active locally. Starting as a member of the school committee, he was for many years a selectman and acted as Moderator at Town Meetings. His wife, Sarah (Winchester), was a devout woman who would have a strong influence on their eldest son, but Timothy's interest in church affairs appears to have been minimal.

He generated profound respect and affection in both his colleagues and his children; numerous accounts of the latter's devotion to him survive. He left no will but, having given generously to each son during his lifetime, he let it be known that his estate was to be equally divided among them and that their mother was to be looked after.

## THE HOMESTEAD

Lieutenant Timothy's widow, Sarah, remained in the house until her death in 1797.

Over the years Major Timothy increased the size of the farm till it covered twenty acres north of the County Road and twenty-seven south of it, extending roughly from Smelt Brook to Hovey Street and from Waban Park well up Mount Ida. He made many improvements, particularly on the hill, where he built "some miles of stone wall" and planted what had been rough pasture land with fruit trees.



**A later picture of the kitchen.**

But the biggest change came in 1809 when Timothy decided to replace the old homestead with a "fine house for the times". True to tradition he designed a two-family house, hoping that Edmund, his youngest son, then unmarried, would eventually join him and Sarah. Because he wanted an inside well, the new structure was built abutting the western wall of the old, enclosing the existing well to make a washroom. The front door of the old house, made of unadorned plank one and a half inches thick, became the door leading from this washroom to the outside. Other parts of the old house were incorporated into the ell which contained the laundry, the storeroom and a bedroom for the "inside man". As to the main structure, it is best described by Timothy's granddaughter, Ellen. "You entered by a large front door into a good sized hall, from which opened on either side doors into a parlor on the left and a sitting room on the right, and from these rooms doors opened into two kitchens, each of them having outside doors, huge fireplaces, brick ovens, and high mantelpieces, with doors leading up the back stairs and down to the cellar and

into the other kitchen. One of these kitchens had a large dresser for dishes and a closet under the front stairs and a door from this led to the laundry.....On the second floor were four large chambers and back halls. Above these a large garret extended over the whole house. The mantels in the parlors were prettily carved, as was the frieze, and all was cut with a knife by Jesse Hall" (whose son, Lewis, would one day marry Timothy's granddaughter, Louisa). Beams a foot thick were brought to the site by oxen, likewise the granite for the underpinning which came from Quincy. The glass was imported from England, tall trees were hollowed out for gutters and the original doorsteps were of beams one and a half feet thick. The wooden sheathing on the north and possibly on the south elevations was painted green, the bricks of the side walls, red. A carriage house, corn house, and barn were also built.

Timothy enjoyed the house only briefly; he died in 1814 and Sarah a year later. All their sons had settled in Boston and for a few years the house was rented to a farmer.

## THE JACKSONS

### William (1783-1855)

William was educated at the local school (where Timothy taught) and briefly at Dr. Stearns's Academy on Galen Street. When he was fifteen a severe leg injury, which left him lame for life, confined him to his bed for many months. Fortunately, the first library in Newton had just opened and the reading he was able to do in that time taught him more, he said, than had it been spent at school. At seventeen he moved to Boston where he worked in the soap and candle factory in which his father had an interest. In due course he became the foreman, and eventually the owner.

During his years in Boston he married twice (Hannah Woodward of Newton and, after her death in 1812, Mary Bennett of Lunenburg), made and lost fortunes, represented Boston in the General Court, and became very involved in the Massachusetts Mechanics Charitable Association. Feeling that his public duties were impinging on his private life, he decided to retire to Newton and become a



**William's family in 1846.**

farmer. Before long he was more involved in affairs outside his home than ever.

In 1825 he was Chairman of the Board of Selectmen. One of the Board's duties was the licensing of the "purveyors of ardent liquors" which he refused to do unless the law were more strictly enforced. Mainly due to his influence, and despite much unpleasantness and opposition, Newton remained dry that year. The insight he gained during those few weeks into the world of drink and drinking so horrified him that he was a prime mover in the creation of the Newton Temperance Society the following year, and was its first secretary

and treasurer. After a year of monthly meetings devoted to temperance-related subjects, interest began to flag and the Society was converted into a Lyceum at which all manner of topics were discussed. Almost by accident William found himself giving a talk on railroads. These became his lifelong interest and he was eventually associated with no fewer than seven railroad companies. It was due largely to his influence that a regular and frequent passenger service between Boston and Newton was introduced in 1844, and he was among the first to anticipate the effect of this on land values and real estate development in Newton.

## THE HOMESTEAD

After Timothy's death his estate was divided equally among his five sons and the heirs of his daughter, Lucretia. When William decided to move to Newton he bought Edward and George's shares and "made a division" with Francis and Stephen whereby they took the land south of Washington Street and he retained the homestead and everything on the north. To accommodate his growing family, appropriate adjustments had to be made to the Homestead — its time as a two-family house came to an end. To quote Ellen again: "Two of the large chambers were divided making four, and one of the kitchens was made into a nursery which was arranged on one side with five berths as on a steam boat, while in the bed slept one of the older sisters with the child next older than the baby, mother always keeping the baby with her." The exterior was painted yellow with cream trim and green shutters. Central heating was installed in the basement in the 1830s.

It was here that William kept open house for the famous and the not so

famous, and provided asylum for runaway slaves. Ellen remembered it as an ideal country home with not a house in sight except her brother Timothy's across Washington Street. The orchards yielded apples, peaches, apricots, plums, and cherries; there was a grape arbor beyond the barn and a flourishing flower garden in which roses and lilacs abounded. The candle business was moved into a building abutting the barn, east of the ell.

Because of his involvement in railroads, William was among the first to

be aware of the changes that the Boston and Albany presaged for Newton. While improved access to the agricultural areas to the west boded ill for farmers, quick and efficient passenger service from Boston opened up possibilities for suburban development, and in 1844 William was responsible for two of the first subdivisions in the town. The laying out and sale of lots in Walnut and Waban Parks made substantial inroads into the farm.

**View of the Homestead  
from a birds-eye map, 1878.**



## THE JACKSONS

In 1832-33 William represented Newton in the General Court. A chance remark made him aware of the tremendous influence wielded at all levels of government by the Masons. He became very active in the anti-Masonic movement and as a result was elected to Congress in 1832. The movement fell apart within a few years, but most of its adherents found their way to the anti-slavery Liberty Party, which in due course merged with the Free Soil Party. Thus began William's association with the Abolitionists.

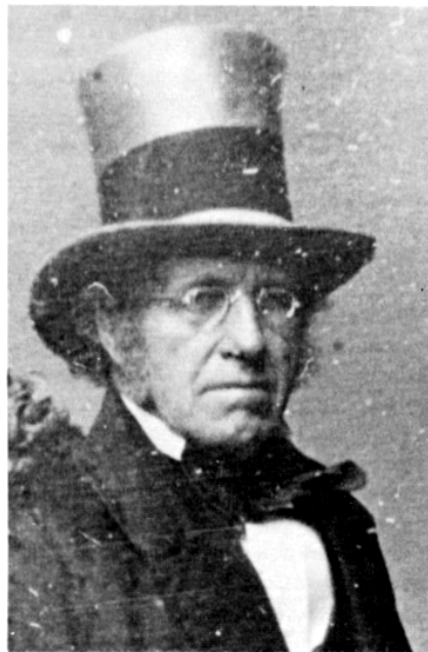
A second offshoot of the temperance movement in Newton was the incorporation of the Newton Savings Bank, founded to encourage saving money rather than spending it on liquor. William was the first president. He was also President of the Newton (later National) Bank from its founding in 1848 until his death, served on a number of town committees, and took an active interest in education, secular and religious.

William was, for most of his life, a deeply religious man. This had not always been so, but the influence of his first wife, and her premature death only months after the loss of his only sister, had a profound effect on him. Active in Sabbath Schools, Deacon of the First Church and, later, of the Eliot Church which he helped to gather, he was gratified to have his children received into the Church and found great satisfaction in the Great Awakening of the 1830s and 40s. The Sabbath was strictly observed at the Homestead.

All these activities and others too numerous to recount, filled William's time, and within a few years of moving the candle factory to Newton he was forced to hand over the management to his son, Timothy, and his nephew, Otis Trowbridge.

William's public and business ventures kept him away from home much of the time, but he was always in touch by letter, and emerges as an understanding, thoughtful, and loving father.

The bad economic state of the country in the early 1850s played havoc with William's investments and caused him a number of financial reverses, so that when he died the estate was insolvent.

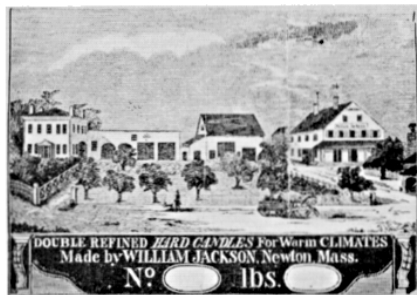


**William.**

## THE HOMESTEAD



View from Mount Ida, before 1886.



Candle factory label



Front door. The ivy grew from a sprig placed on William's coffin.

## THE JACKSONS

### Mary (Bennett) (1792-1867)

After William's death Mary remained in the house with their three unmarried daughters. They managed to keep the Homestead going by taking in boarders and each in her own way earning what she could.

The daughter of David and Sarah Bennett of Lunenburg, Mary went as a young girl to live with the Jacksons as a companion to the ailing Hannah. After Hannah's death, when William gave up his home, Mary took charge of the four oldest children who went to live in Newton with Hannah's sister, their Aunt Trowbridge.

Mary and William were married in 1815 and in the next twenty years she bore him twelve children. Though her health was always indifferent, she managed to perform many acts of charity, and as a warm, welcoming, loving mother and grandmother, was remembered with affection by succeeding generations.

### Ellen, Caroline, and Cornelia

After their mother's death, Ellen, Caroline, and Cornelia maintained the Homestead tradition of hospitality and community service into the twentieth century. Ellen was, perhaps, the most gifted of the three sisters. Well-read, a good conversationalist and gracious hostess, she will always be remembered for her exquisite flower paintings and for putting on paper the *Annals from the Old Homestead*. As president of the Freedmen's Aid Society from its formation until just before her death, she carried on the work of her abolitionist father and her uncle, Francis.

After Ellen's death in 1902, Sarah, the daughter of Marion (Jackson) and Lyman Gilbert, moved into the Homestead. An artist, she had lived and worked for many years in New York, which she now left to become "the mainstay of her aunts". Cornelia, "Aunt Mouse", was a noted philanthropist.

Just before Christmas, 1878, she wrote a letter to the *Newton Journal* appealing, in the name of Santa Claus, for food and clothing for the poor. This was the beginning of the Santa Claus Agency which developed into an organization capable of helping thirty-nine families in one year. Through her efforts *The Poems of the Jackson Homestead* was published in 1902. Never strong, she died the following year of the heart ailment which had made her, for some years, a semi-invalid.

"Aunt Cutty", Caroline, became Assistant Librarian when the library was taken over by the city in 1878. A spry old lady and enthusiastic gardener, she survived until 1906.



## THE HOMESTEAD

To settle William's estate, Lewis Hall, his son-in-law and executor, was forced to sell the entire farm except for three acres surrounding the house. These and the Homestead were subsequently bought at auction by Sarah Tappan, William's oldest daughter, who sold the property to her mother and sisters for a dollar.

During the next half century there were few changes; the well gave way to the municipal water supply in 1877, and it must have been about the same time that the factory building was taken down.



**Before 1907,  
viewed from the east.**



**Caroline in the dining room.**

## EPILOGUE

Caroline left the Homestead to the children of her late sister, Frances Smallwood: Edwin, Louise (Keith), and Frances (Bacon). To make the division of the estate possible, it was bought by another of William's grandchildren, Walter M., son of William Ward Jackson. As he had a home in Boston he rented the house to the Keiths, first selling about half the land and having the house completely renovated under Louise Keith's direction.

Modern plumbing was installed in the bathroom and kitchen and the system tied in to the city sewer; carpenters worked for eight weeks, a major task being to re-inforce one of the "main east-west beams" with iron braces. Though it was possible to preserve some of the original crown glass in the windows, seventy-six new panes had to be installed. The entire interior was repainted and it might have been at that time that the exterior was painted white for the first time. It is not clear either whether the back porch and the door opening on to it date from then or later.



**Frances Middendorf.**

Louise died in 1923, and Harry Keith remained in the house with two of their children, Barbara and William, until his death two years later, when Edwin and Sarah Smallwood moved in. When Sarah died in 1932, the house was rented to Dr. Roland Barrette who made a number of changes to accommodate his dental practice. He also built a tennis court at the back.

In the meantime Walter M. Jackson had died in 1927, leaving the property to

his three sons who, thirteen years later, sold it to their cousin, Frances (Hatch) Paine. In 1949, then married to Harry Middendorf, she sold part of the property to Dr. Barrette for a new office, and gave the Homestead and the remainder of the land to the City of Newton for educational, recreational, and other public purposes.

Since the Homestead became the City Museum a number of changes have been made. Inside the most notable is, perhaps, the remodelling of the ell in 1966. Here are now kept the photograph, slide and manuscript collections among which, carefully preserved, are the materials given by various members of the Jackson family which have made this short history of them and their Homestead possible.

