

# Berry Pike Farm - A Brief History

The Berry Pike Farm, located at 222 Old Bay Road in New Durham, stands at the heart of what was once the town's original center. This crossroads, where Old Bay Road, Ham Road, and Davis Crossing Road meet, served for generations as a hub of community, trade, and travel.

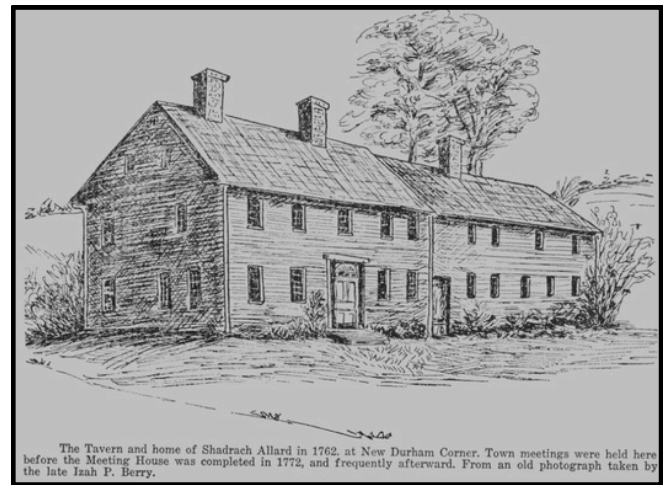
The Old Bay Road itself began as the Indigenous Winninanbeskek Trail (original spelling), a travel route connecting Lake Winnepesaukee to Dover Point. In 1721, the Colonial Assembly in Portsmouth authorized the cutting of a road from Cocheco (now Dover) to "Winnipishoky Pond" (Lake Winnepesaukee). The following year, colonial soldiers widened the trail into what became known as the Bay Road, sections of which still survive in New Durham today. For decades, this road remained a vital travel artery and continues to be referenced in deeds and property boundaries.

On December 10, 1762, New Durham was officially incorporated and granted full town privileges by Royal Governor Benning Wentworth, under King George III, officially establishing New Durham and allowing its people to govern themselves while still paying taxes to Britain.

The new township, marked out in a rhomboid shape six miles square, was divided into two sections of 100 lots each, with every lot containing 100 acres. Highways between ranges were laid out four rods wide and those between lots two rods wide. As with all royal land grants of the time, "all white pine trees fit for His Majesty's use for masting ye Royal Navy" were reserved.

Across the road from the Berry Pike Home (now the 0.63 acre garage lot) once stood the Shadrack Allard Tavern, built in 1762, the same year New Durham was incorporated. The tavern became a gathering place for travelers, civic leaders, and townsfolk. One of the conditions of the Town Charter was that a Meetinghouse was to be built and just up the hill on the rocky ledge it remains, in part, today. In 1772, the first meeting recorded by settlers was held but due to the meetinghouse having no heat, they quickly adjourned to the Shadrack Allard Tavern, just down the hill. Large in scale, it housed Shadrack, his wife Sarah, and their many children. As tavern keeper, Shadrack was often

named in New Durham annals, as a man of good character, and respected throughout the community. He was known to hold town offices, did his share in improving the land and tried to maintain good order in his place of business. Later the tavern was run by Major Joseph Mooney until 1802-03 and subsequently owned by Stephen Berry Jr. and Joseph Berry. The tavern was eventually torn down around 1910. Today, remnants of its stone foundations and chimney bases can still be seen, some beneath the garage on the property. The tavern's history includes both convivial gatherings and tragedy. In February 1788, Elder Benjamin Randall recorded in church records that a man named Peter Drowne was fatally stabbed at the tavern by Elisha Thomas - a grim reminder of the harsher realities of early life.



Artwork courtesy of Ellen Jennings, Author of "History of New Durham"

The earliest surviving town records, preserved in Volume A (1765–1803) and Volume B (1803–1837), provide a window into these formative years. These copies, transcribed during a WPA project in the 1930s, include vital records of marriages, births, and deaths. One such entry records the marriage of Richard Jennings and Polley (Polly) Allard on December 7, 1794. The Jennings family, like many others along the Bay Road, represents the generational thread of settlement that tied the early community to this historic crossroads.

While the exact year of construction is not documented, with Richard and Polly Jennings marrying in 1794, they likely established their homestead on this site in the early years following their marriage – a much smaller version of this grand home. Five years later, in 1799, Jennings sold the modest, home and outbuildings to John Wheeler, an apothecary of Dover, for \$600. At that time the house was described as 40' long, one story high and almost finished, with stables well-finished of 28'x24', and a 16' shop, situated near the town's first Meeting House.

Over the next 40 years we know the house changed hands at least one more time. In 1841, David Steele, Esq. purchased the property from James Hilton for a sum between \$800 and \$1,025, unconfirmed, and at this time the lot still contained 80 or more acres of land from the original 100. Steele not only enlarged the home but also created a law office on the east side, complete with its own separate entrance. It was documented in a letter from Col. Thomas Tash (a founding figure of New Durham) great, great granddaughter, that described the law office of Mr. David Steele which was a large three-story home located in the V between Bay Road and Ham Road. Later, renovations combined this office space into the living room that is there now, with a large fireplace and the tall three-story chimney now concealing the old door, which can be seen below.



Photo sourced from the Town of New Durham Historic Collections

In 1856, the home was sold to Ichabod Berry, and remained in the Berry family for the next 125 years. Ichabod Berry transformed the home into a lively family residence. Under the Berry family's care, the home evolved with many changes and additions which enhanced this multifaceted family home and farm into both a business and social hub. Ichabod ran a successful insurance business from Steele's former office. A dance hall with a separate porch entrance was added - the ballroom on the second floor, decorated with charming scenic murals in the Rufus Porter School style, painted by itinerant artists circa 1870-1875 who lived with the family while working. Lua Berry, Ichabod's granddaughter and the last of the Berry line to live there, later remembered the happy evenings when her grandfather played fiddle tunes as neighbors danced into the early hours of the morning. Community events such as a husking bee; when corn was ripe it was picked and piled up on the barn floor brought friends together for work and merriment, followed by feasts and dancing described in the *Farmington News* as legendary. Many a local romance, it was said, began at the Berry homestead during these social affairs.

The family was industrious and civic-minded. Almira Gooch, Ichabod's wife, kept a small store across from the big house and sold notions of small items that one might need about the house. Ichabod and his son Zanello both served in town government and as members of the General Court in Concord. Many of the Berry women worked as schoolteachers, one of the few professions open to women at the time. Lua's brother, Iza, became town treasurer and was known for showing the family's teams of winning prize oxen, raised on the farm, at Rochester fairs. As a boy, he even built a covered wagon to sleep beside the oxen at the fairgrounds, lantern in hand to keep watch. Neighbors remembered him as a skilled hunter, fisherman, and cider maker - old casks and glass bottles still remain in the cellar today! Lua herself carried on the family legacy when she returned to the homestead with her husband Cecil Pike after his retirement from Spaulding Fiber.



Photo sourced from the Town of New Durham Historic Collections



The Berry Pike Farm remained in the family until the late 20th century, when in 1981 Samuel and Lorna Hardy purchased the property. The Hardy's are credited for carefully restoring and maintaining the home, even commissioning modern artists to conserve the murals. Thanks to their stewardship, much of the home's unique history has been preserved.

The Allard and Berry families are buried nearby, in an old family burial ground off Ham Road, which easements on the current property lead to. Their presence there, along with the house itself, anchors the story of the Berry Pike Homestead within the larger narrative of New Durham's settlement and growth. From its beginnings as a simple dwelling on the edge of the Meeting House, to its life as a social center filled with music, murals, and memories, this home reflects the resilience, enterprise, and love of the families who lived here.



Shadrack Allard's Tavern, circa 1910, prior to demolition.



Remaining foundation stones on "garage lot" Photos courtesy of Catherine Orlowicz



#### Sources & Credits:

Compiled from research by Prior Town Historian Eloise Bickford and Current Town Historian Catherine Orlowicz, with additional information from author Ellen R. Jennings (History of New Durham) and the early church records of Elder Benjamin Randall. Vital records excerpted by Ann Theopold Chaplin, C.G., and published in The New Hampshire Genealogical Record Vol. 11, No. 1 & 2. Transcriptions by K. Torp (from WPA copies of original town records).

#### Image Credits:

Historic photographs of the home (1856 and c.1910) and of Lua and Iza Berry with oxen are from the Town of New Durham Historic Collections. Images of the Allard Tavern, its foundations, and chimney bases are also from the Town Collections and modern photographs by Catherine Orlowicz. A pencil sketch of the tavern is by Ellen R. Jennings, author of History of New Durham.