

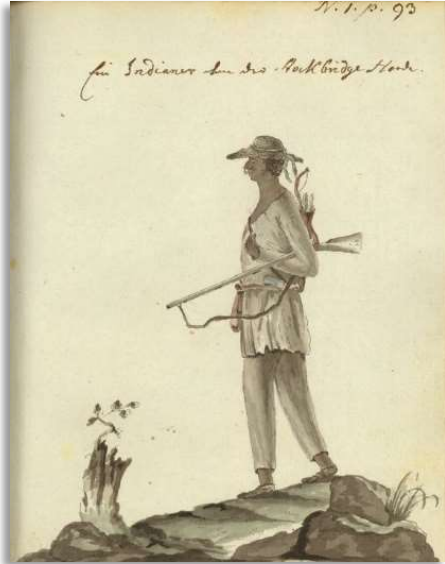
“OUTSIDE-THE-HOUSE TOUR” HISTORY PRIMER



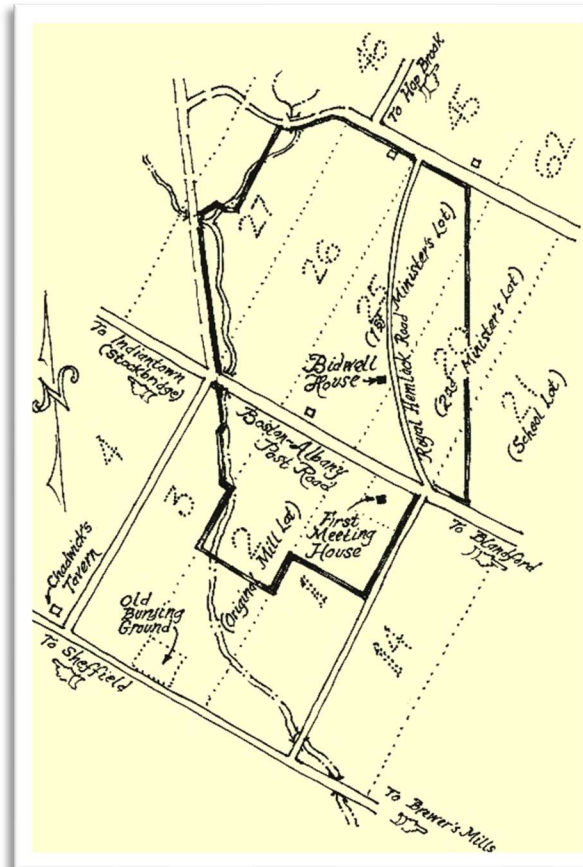
HISTORY PRIMER OF THE BIDWELL HOUSE PROPERTY PRE-HISTORY TO PRESENT

This “Outside-the-House Tour” of the Bidwell House grounds tells a bit of the story about this area from pre-history to the present. Using the Key Map, Native American Interpretive Guide, and Trail Map, explore the history of this property and see what you can find.

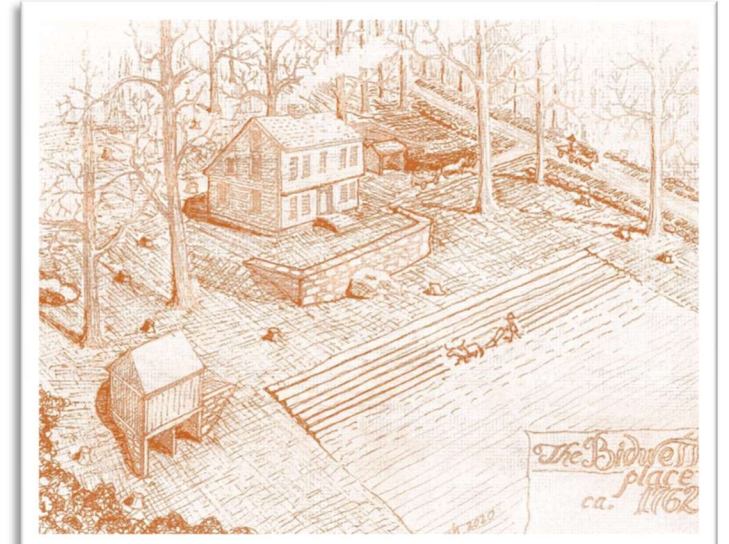
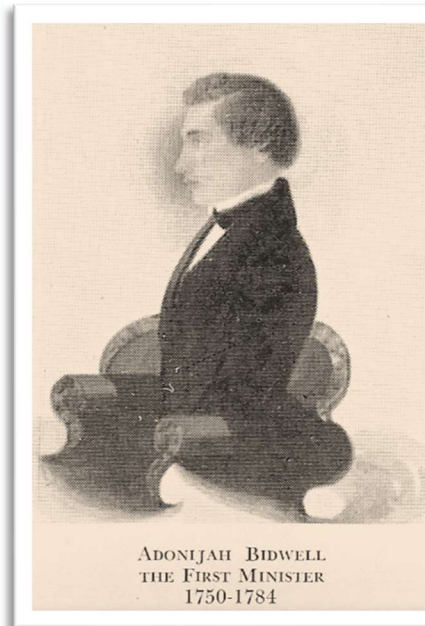
10,000 Years Ago to 1780s: Native Americans: This area was the homeland for Native Americans for millennia! Archaeological investigations in Stockbridge, Great Barrington, Sheffield and other Berkshire locations have shown both permanent settlements and hunting encampments dating back well over seven thousand years. The Muhhekuneok – *People of the Waters that are Never Still* – called Mohicans by the English and Dutch – lived in the Hudson River and Housatonic River valleys and used these woodlands as their hunting grounds. They managed the land by burning off the understory once or twice a year. Hundreds of projectile points and stone tools have been found in Monterey. The European “colonization” (expropriation) of the area in the 1600s and 1700s devastated the Native Americans. About 90% of their population died from European diseases such as smallpox and measles. Surviving remnant bands were resettled in “Indiantown” (Stockbridge) between 1734 and 1784. Many of their men were killed fighting on the side of the Patriots in the Revolutionary War, and by then almost all their lands had been taken from the Native Americans. The European Colonists’ insatiable lust for land forced the Native Americans to relocate, first to central New York, then eventually settling in Northern Wisconsin, where their reservation remains today. But this area remains their Sacred Homeland, to which they return frequently.



1734 to 1750: Colonial Settlement – Meeting House, Roads, Mills, Colonists: Township No. 1 was one of four townships chartered by the Mass. General Court (colonial legislature) in 1734 for settlement. The land for the four townships – Tyringham (and Monterey), New Marlborough, Sandisfield, Becket, plus provinceland that became Otis – was “bought” from the Native Americans for £360. The townships were laid out along the “Great Road” – the old Indian Path – between Westfield and North Sheffield (Great Barrington). A branch road split off to run to Indiantown (Stockbridge). The early colonists, called “Proprietors,” surveyed and subdivided the township into 64 home lots and about 250 other lots. As hard as it is to believe today, the Bidwell House was the center of the planned township, containing the first Meeting House, the original site for Grist and Saw Mills, one of the main “highways,” a lot reserved for a School, and lots reserved for the First and Second Ministers to the township, as shown on the map to the right. Roads were laid out, cleared and graded; home sites cleared and homes built, fields cleared and “English Grass” and grain crops were planted; the Meeting House building was built; mills were constructed (further downstream at what is now Monterey Village). By 1750, about 30 families were living in town.

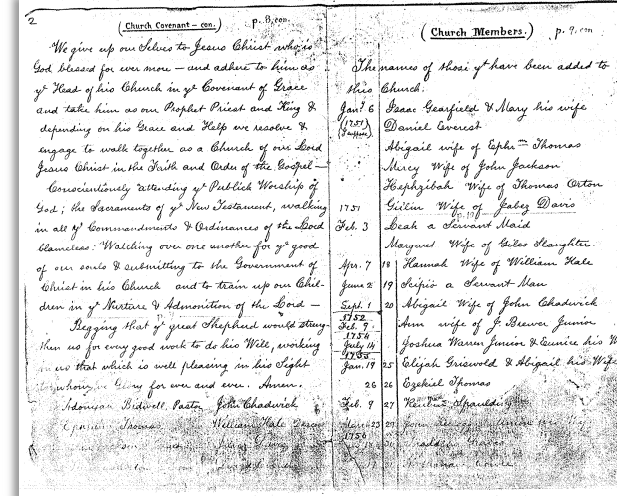


The image is a composite of two parts. On the left is a black and white portrait of Adonijah Bidwell, a man with dark hair, wearing a dark suit and a white cravat, seated and facing slightly to the right. Below the portrait is a caption: "ADONIJAH BIDWELL THE FIRST MINISTER 1750-1784". On the right is a sepia-toned sketch of a two-story house with a gabled roof, surrounded by trees and a fence. A small cart or carriage is visible in the foreground. A handwritten note in the bottom right corner of the sketch reads "The Bidwell place ca. 1762".



In 1752, at the late age of 36, Rev. Bidwell married Theodosia Colton, of Hartford CT; she died in 1759 without children. He remarried a year later to her first cousin, Jemima Devotion, with whom he had four children: Adonijah Jr., Barnabas, Jemima, and Theodosia. His second wife died in 1771, and he married a third time to Ruth Kent, who raised his four children in the house he had built.

Rev. Bidwell was instrumental in the formation and growth of the township, incorporated as Tyringham in 1762. By 1765, the town population was 325 people, with 55 families in 51 houses. And by 1790, the town population was 1,397 in 140 households. Rev. Bidwell baptized 378 people during his tenure here, and the population grew from fewer than 100 people to over 1000. He sold beef to the army during the Revolutionary War, and his oldest son, Adonijah, Jr, served in the militia. His younger son, Barnabas Bidwell, was enrolled at Yale.



He delivered hundreds of sermons over 34 years; they were written in his unique shorthand. One of the museum's interns was able to "crack the code" to interpret the sermons.



As minister, Rev. Bidwell was considered to be relatively “well off,” but even for him, hard money was “scarce as gold”. For four years during the revolutionary war, the town declined to pay his salary as minister.

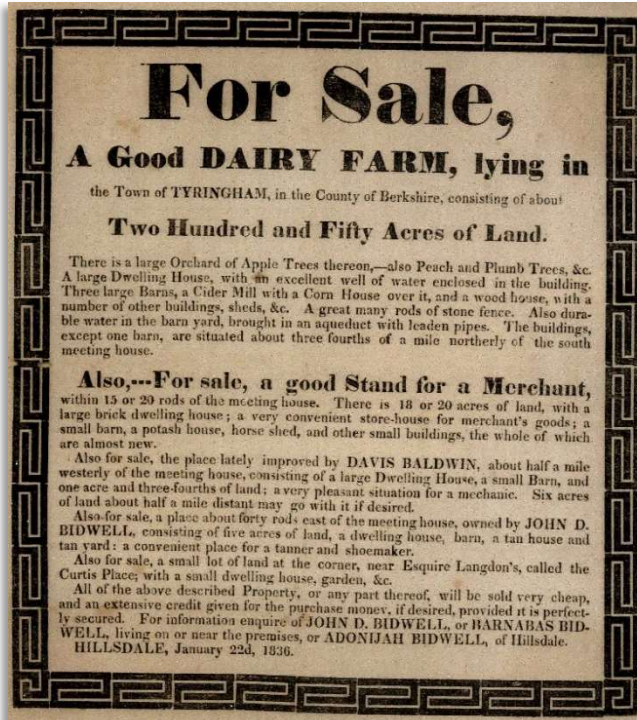
Rev. Bidwell died in 1784 at age 68, survived by his four children and widow. The tax assessment that year listed his property as having: one dwelling house, one barn, 4 acres of tillage, 14 acres of English and upland mowing, 10 acres of pasturage, 8 acres of woodland, 396 acres of un-improved land (of which 350 acres was "un-improvable land"), 3 horses and mares three years old or older, 11 "neat" (beef) cattle, 5 milk cows, and 12 sheep and goats. He was certainly one of the largest landowners.

The inventory of his estate after his death has been preserved and itemizes all the extensive furnishings of his house and farm. The interior furnishings of the present Bidwell House were collected to be representative of what was in the house in 1784, based on the inventory.

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1784 to 1836: Adonijah Bidwell, Jr. (1761-1837): Adonijah Junior was the oldest son of Rev. Bidwell and Jemima (Devotion) Bidwell, and he inherited the farm from his father. He was a Real Estate “baron,” owning numerous properties throughout Tyringham (Monterey). He married Meliscent Dench of Hopkinton in 1789, and they had 12 children, six of whom lived to adulthood. During his ownership of the property, he expanded the house by adding an “ell” on the northwest end, enclosing an old well in the process. His farm participated in the “sheep fever” in the 1820s, when Merino sheep were imported and huge areas of New England woodland were cleared for sheep pasture.



The town’s population began to decline in the 1820s as the Erie Canal opened the “West;” New England farmers left these cold rocky hills for the better land of New York and Ohio. Adonijah offered to sell the Bidwell farm in 1834, but deeded the 250 acres to his son, John Devotion Bidwell for “\$1 plus love and affection.”

1836 to 1854: John Devotion Bidwell (1792 – 1867)

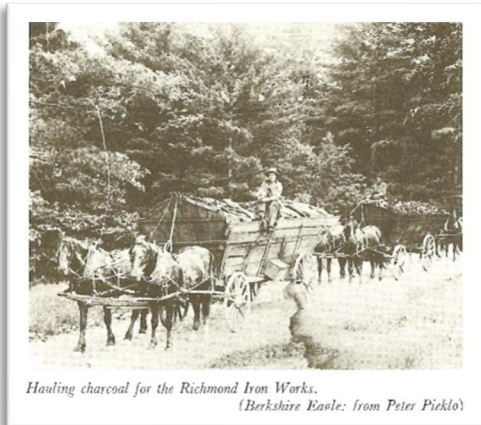
As noted above, John D. Bidwell received the 250-acre Bidwell homestead from his father in 1834. John was already well established in another home in “Old Center” ½ mile south but moved into the old Bidwell house. He added the east wing to the house, including the “1840s room,” woodshed, and 2nd story loft with sleeping quarters for the help. John was, among other things, a tanner, town clerk, and surveyor. He likely used the addition for his offices as town clerk. In 1854, he sold the property, ending 104 years of Bidwell ownership.



1854 to 1910: Carringtons, Charcoaling, and Dairying

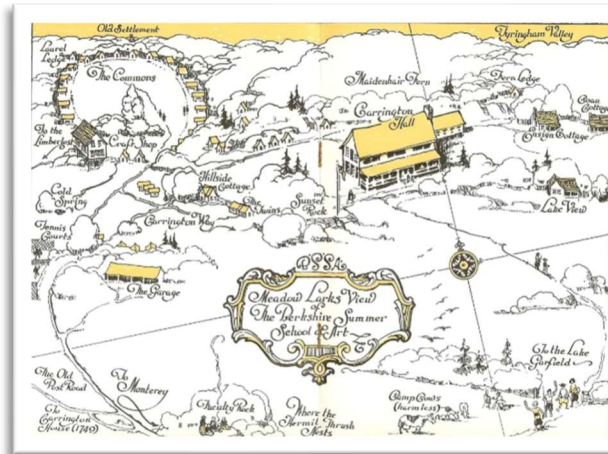
The “Olde Manse” property was purchased by the Richmond Iron Works Company, not for iron ore, but for the timber that would make charcoal

for their many iron furnaces in the Berkshires. Richmond Iron Works then sold the property to Seymour Carrington with the proviso that they would provide charcoal for the Van Deusenville Furnace in the Housatonic section of Great Barrington. Charcoaling was a major industry in Monterey and throughout the Berkshires during the 1850s – 1880s. This resulted in a near total clear cutting of the woodlands in the Berkshires. By 1900, less than 10% of the woodland remained.



Hauling charcoal for the Richmond Iron Works.
(Berkshire Eagle; from Peter Pickle)

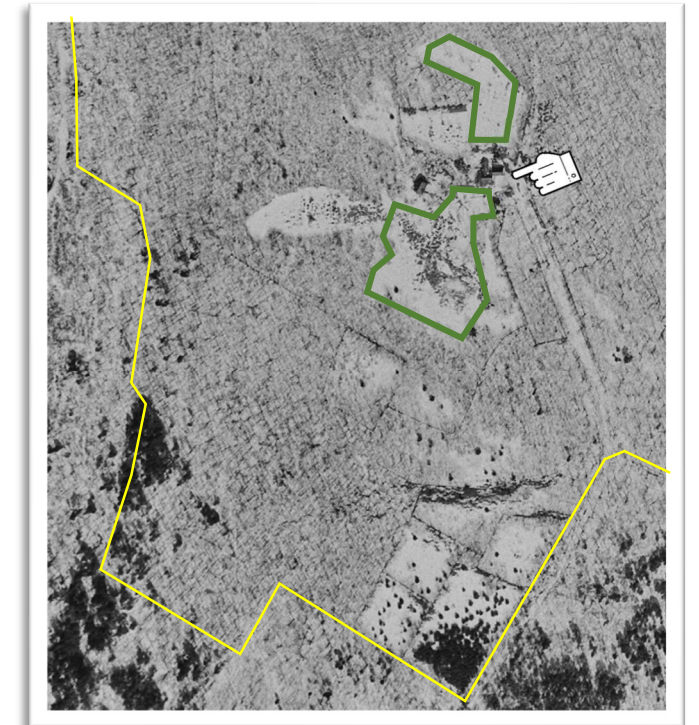
Three generations of Carringtons farmed the land, making charcoal, maple syrup, and dairying. Three large barns were used for their dairy operations. The Carrington family sold the property in 1910, moving to a farm in Lee which was warmer and far less rocky than this hard piece of ground in Monterey.



Mid 1900s: Summer Residences: The Olde Manse was owned by several families as a summer residence during the 1930s through the 1950s. The house was “modernized” with dormers, the old drafty fireplaces were closed up, plumbing and electricity was added. And the woodlands began to grow back, slowly reclaiming the fields, pastures, and 4 miles of stone walls that six previous generations of New England farmers had scabbled from the rocky landscape.

The 1943 aerial photo to the right shows how the woodlands had regrown by then. Most of the fields that were still cleared at that time are now totally wooded. Only the outlined areas remain fields. (The light line is the southerly and westerly boundary of the property. The hand points to the Bidwell House.)

The photograph shows many of the stone walls that surrounded the fields and pastures, and which are visible today in the woods along many of the museum’s trails, mute testimony to the labors of the past.



1960 to 1990: Hargis and Brush – Preservation, Restoration, and Furnishings

Jack Hargis and David Brush bought the Olde Manse in 1960 and spent the next twenty five years restoring the house. They removed the dormers, restored the fireplaces, carefully removed layers of paint and wallpaper, and replaced the early-20th century windows with historically accurate (reproduction) 9 over 12 double hung windows. And, they used Rev. Adonijah Bidwell’s 1784 inventory to collect antiques to furnish the house so it closely replicated how the house would have looked while Rev. Bidwell’s family was living there. Jack and David also created many flower gardens around the house. They bequeathed the house, furnishings, and 192 acre property to become a museum open to the public for the education and historic preservation of this hinterland settlement. The museum opened its doors in May 1990.

1990 to present: Bidwell House Museum!

We are pleased to welcome you to the museum in our 30th Anniversary year.

The Bidwell House Museum is a New England heritage site providing a personal encounter with history – including Native Americans and early American colonial-era lifeways, and the Berkshire landscape – through its land, house and collection. The Museum is a non-profit educational institution funded and run by volunteers and members for the benefit of the community and today’s audiences of all ages, dedicated to preservation, scholarship and enjoyment of the landmark site.

Although the historic house is temporarily closed for inside tours, we hope you enjoy the “Outside-the-House Tour” featuring the gardens, fields, woodlands, stone walls, interpretive trails, and historical exhibits.