

## Chatham's Squire

### AT THE ATWOOD HOUSE

by spencer grey

Although for centuries in England important landowners were given the title of “squire,” the term was rarely used in the more democratic United States. But Chatham in the late 18th through the early 19th centuries had its very own squire, namely Squire Sears.

Along with the Collins, Hamilton, and Atwood families, the Sears family owned most of the land in the early days of the settlement of Chatham, with the Sears family having the largest holdings. They had an extensive farm that covered most of the current land of Chatham Bars Inn and its golf course, extending from Main Street by the Civil War Monument to the eastern coast where the inn now stands.

Richard Sears's grandfather, Daniel, built a large and imposing house at the intersection of Seaview and Main Streets, with a general store attached to it. His son died at an early age, leaving his widow to raise their children, Richard and David. When he was a young man, David moved to Boston and became a prosperous merchant, acquiring what was reputed to be the largest fortune in the city at that time.

Born in 1749, Richard remained in Chatham, living in the house that had been built by his grandfather. He acquired his own fortune, including not only his large farm but also one of the several saltworks in town, as well as involvement in fishing and shipping activities. His civic activities in Chatham were numerous, among them town clerk, town treasurer, coroner, state senator, justice of the peace, and representative to the general court. While serving in the legislature, the Squire frequently rode his horse to Boston, where he would stay at his brother's house on Beacon Street. Not surprisingly he became friends with some of the other notable men in the city, including Noah Webster, James Otis, and Josiah Quincy.

Sears was justifiably a proud man who was described as a man “... who was tall and of great dignity in manner; calm in speech and action; civil and attractive in his intercourse with his fellows. He was a conscientious Christian man and a strong supporter of the church.” He was a gentleman of the old school with a sort of pompous air and wore his hair tied up in a queue behind. Throughout his life he continued to dress as men had in the late 18th century, wearing long hose, buckles on his knees and shoes and ruffled shirts.

In 1778 he married Mehitable Marshall of Framingham, with whom he had six children: Sarah, Richard, Daniel, Hetty, Ebenezer, and Fear (his mother's maiden name).

He was proud of his ancestry, being a direct descendant of Richard Sears, known as the “Pilgrim” as he had been one of the first settlers in Plymouth Colony. The squire lived to the age of 90, when he died peacefully in his own bed in 1839 and was buried in the Union Cemetery.



