

EBENEZER CRAFTS

(October 4, 1740 – May 24, 1810)



Yale graduate, builder, and original owner of the Publick House, Sturbridge, and Minute Man are among the many roles of Ebenezer Crafts, one of the co-founders of Leicester Academy.

A native of Pomfret, Connecticut, Crafts was the 12th of 15 children born to Joseph Craft [no “s” here], captain of the Pomfret militia, and Susannah Warner.

At 15 years of age, Crafts and several of his friends traveled on horseback to New Haven to study theology at Yale University. Upon completion of his divinity degree in 1759, Crafts began to preach, with the hope of finding his own parish. When no invitation was extended, he turned from theology to business, or trade as it was then called, and farming in Pomfret.

Crafts married Mehitable Chandler of Woodstock, Connecticut, on December 9, 1762. Six years later, the couple and their four-year-old daughter moved

to Woodstock, where Crafts worked as a tradesman before purchasing a large farm in Sturbridge. There he built what has come to be known as the Publick House, adding taverner and innkeeper to his other occupations.

Extremely active in community affairs, Crafts organized, drilled, and served as captain of a cavalry militia in Sturbridge. On April 20, 1775, in response to the alarms set off at Lexington and Concord the day before, Captain Crafts and his troop joined Colonel Ebenezer Learned’s regiment in the Siege of Boston. The troop’s assignment was Cambridge. Crafts later served as the first colonel of the Worcester County cavalry regiment, which participated in quashing what was later referred to as Shays’ Rebellion.

Aware of the value of a literate citizenry to the new republic, Crafts studied the feasibility of establishing an academy, or college preparatory school, in Sturbridge. However, when a large building in the center of Leicester became available, he readily determined that the school should be located there. With Colonel Jacob Davis of Charlton and Asa Sprague of Spencer,* Crafts purchased the structure, which had belonged to the late Aaron Lopez, a wealthy merchant. On June 7, 1784, Leicester Academy opened its doors to three students, one of whom was Crafts’ only son, Samuel Chandler Crafts, who would eventually become governor of Vermont. A member of the initial Board of Trustees of the new Academy, Colonel Crafts chose to become not an officer of the Board, but the first steward and butler of the school.

Crafts left Sturbridge in 1791 to settle an undeveloped township in northern Vermont that he and a number of other pioneers from Central Massachusetts had established three years before. Originally called Minden, the township was soon renamed in honor of Crafts as Craftsbury. Ebenezer Crafts remained a respected and contributory figure of the new community until his death in 1810.

**Sprague sold his share of the purchase to Crafts shortly after the trio acquired the Lopez mansion.*