

Subject: Bidwell Lore - Dr. Oliver Partridge and the Indian Burying Grounds

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Hello Friends,

Welcome to week 49 of Bidwell Lore! This week we introduce you to Dr. Oliver Partridge, a Bidwell relation through marriage who was also a friend to the Mohicans of Stockbridge.

Thank you to everyone for continuing to [support](#) the Museum! All of your donations help us continue to create programming and produce Bidwell Lore throughout the winter.

[Dr. Oliver Partridge and the Indian Burying Grounds](#)

As you may remember from our Bidwell Lore installments last summer, Rev. Adonijah Bidwell and his second wife Jemima had four children. Their third child Jemima (1765-1842) married William Partridge (1763-1846). William's older brother Oliver Partridge, though a bit further out on the family tree, seemed worthy of mention in a Bidwell Lore article and has an important connection to the Mohicans of Stockbridge.

Oliver Partridge (1751-1848) was the second doctor to serve the Town of Stockbridge. He lived in the Rev. John Sergeant's second home, the so-called Mission House on Prospect Hill Road, with his sister, Elizabeth Partridge Sergeant and his brother-in-law, Dr. Erastus Sergeant. Dr. Sargent was the first doctor in Stockbridge, and the son of the missionary Rev. John Sergeant. Partridge moved to Stockbridge in 1771, at the age of twenty, having just finished his medical training. He lived in the Mission House for 77 years, acquiring the property upon the death of his brother-in-law and practiced medicine beyond his 95th year. He was a member of the Dudley-Winthrop Family, known for their involvement in colonial politics. He was also a great-great grandson of Massachusetts Governor Simon Bradstreet and a great-great-great-grandson of Massachusetts Governor and Harvard founder Thomas Dudley. A veteran of the 1777 Battle of Bennington, Partridge *"treated the mortal wounds of Colonel Baum, who commanded the enemy."*

"Dr. Partridge's great grandfather Colonel Samuel Partridge moved into Hatfield in 1687 and died there in 1740. Only two of his children had families, Samuel second and Edward. Edward was born in 1683 and died in 1757. In 1707 Edward was married to Martha Williams, by whom he had two daughters and one son named Oliver, who was born in 1712 and died in 1792. Colonel Oliver Partridge [Dr. Oliver Partridge's father] graduated 2nd in his class at Yale in 1730, married in 1734, and had thirteen children.

Hardly had Col Oliver Partridge graduated before his grandfather Colonel Samuel Partridge is seeking a position for him, desiring the General Court to appoint him as junior clerk with Israel Williams. This was January 5, 1733. Governor Belcher, in April 1734, desires the court to appoint [Colonel] Oliver Partridge joint clerk of the pleas without further delay. There is reason for thinking that kinship induced a favorable issue; for the wife of Governor Belcher was the daughter of Lieutenant Governor Partridge of New Hampshire. Having obtained the desired office securing pecuniary support, we find him married in 1734 to Anna Williams, daughter of Rev. William Williams of Weston, and granddaughter of Rev. Solomon Stoddard."[1]

The Stoddard, Williams and Partridge families dominated the political and religious lives of the citizens of Western Massachusetts for most of the 1700s. Dr. Partridge's sister Martha was married to Hampshire County High Sheriff Solomon Stoddard, grandson of Connecticut River God the Rev. Solomon Stoddard, who was sometimes referred to as the Pope of Western Massachusetts and his sister Anna Partridge was married to Deacon Nehemiah Bull, son of the Rev. Nehemiah Bull, one of the founders of the Stockbridge Indian Mission. Finally, another sister, Sophia Partridge, was married to Elijah Williams, Berkshire County's first High Sheriff from 1761 to 1776, founder of the Town of West Stockbridge, store owner and usurper of much Stockbridge Indian land, no doubt making his father Ephraim Williams, Sr. a proud man.

| 174 | | R. John Sergeant | | Doll on | | | |
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| | | To amount of Debt from Book. | | | | | |
| | | A. page 130. — | | £4 | | 19 11 | |
| | | To wit: due on the same — | | 15 | | 6 | |
| | | By amount of C. for same page. | | £1 | | 6 | |
| 1780 | | | | | | | |
| Apr. 7. 8. 9. | 11. 12. | To 4 Vis: found: 11/7. — | | 11 | | 7 | |
| June 24. | | To Vis: found: 2/6. — | | 2 | | 6 | |
| July 9 | | To Vis: found: 2/2. — | | 2 | | 2 | |
| Aug. 31. | | To Vis: found: 2/1. — | | 2 | | 1 | |
| Nov. 20 | | To 1/2 yr. of a Vial 2/2 20 1/2 to 3/5 | | 3 | | 5 | |
| 1789 | | | | | | | |
| Feb. 19 | | To Price 1/- | | 1 | | | |
| May 19 | | By an order on Dwight & Atherton 40/- | | 40 | | 0 | |
| June 13 | | To Vis: & 1/ (1790 Sept. 14) med: 1/- | | 2 | | 6 | |
| 1790 Oct. 1. 20. | | To Vis: found: 3/6. | | 3 | | 6 | |
| 1792 Apr. 1. 2. 9. | | To found: 4/4. (June 22. 26.) 3 Vis: found: 13/0. | | 10 | | | |
| July 10 | | To med: 2/1. (Oct. 2. 20) Vis: found: 2/4. | | 4 | | 4 | |
| | | To my acct. of Indians viz: Anna 3/6 | | | | | |
| | | Maria 3/0 Dis: Quanaahcont. 3/10. | | 3 | | 1 1 | |
| | | Dis: John 13/10 + 3/1 Peter Danguemquet 28/6 | | | | | |
| 1793. | | By payment on Indian acct. | | | | 2 7 0 | |
| March 16 | | By commission of 1/4 for collecting — | | | | 15 1 | |
| | | The payment for Peter was but 2/4 | | | | | |
| | | instead of 2/4 as we set it. 3/1 too much | | 3 | | | |
| | | credited upon therefore charge | | | | | |
| 14 | | To med: 1 1/4. | | 1 | | 4 | |
| June 26. | | To 4 Vis: found: 12/10 | | 12 | | 10 | |
| 27. 29. 30. | | To 4 Vis: found: 6/0. C. 7/3. | | 6 | | 0 7 3 | |
| July 3. 5. 10. | 15. | Carried to Ledger No. 4. page 31 | | 12 | | 10 1 6 9 3 | |

Above is a page from Dr. Partridge's Ledger # 2 for Rev. John Sergeant, Jr., some of which involves treatment of several members of the Mohican community still living in Stockbridge in the 1790s.

Although land rich, Dr. Oliver Partridge, like most people during those times, made great use of the barter system to trade his medical services for things like someone haying his fields or items he needed from the local blacksmith. Although Partridge never married, he was very generous to his nieces and nephews and later to his grandnieces and nephews, the children and grandchildren of Dr. Erastus Sergeant and his sister Elizabeth. What follows are a few letters and stories that show you a bit more about the character of Dr. Oliver Partridge.

On May 1, 1821 Dr. Partridge, age 70, wrote the following letter to The Assessors of Stockbridge: Gentlemen: "When Mr. Hamilton called on me for my taxes some time ago I was surprised at the

amount of them, that I could not have paid them (had I been able to go out) until I had found out why they were so high.

They were about a quarter higher than the taxes of those whom I used to confer.

It cannot be reasonable for my lands (of which I have a larger proportion than what is common) I say for my lands to be taxed more than one who would not change lands with me, if I would give him half the value of mine to boot.

If I was taxed for faculty, it was wrong, for I am depended on as a Physician. I had very few patients last year or the year before last.

If I was taxed for debts due it was not right, for the most that is due me never can – nor ever will be collected – for they are desperate. When I undertook to assist my nephews John & George out of their difficulties, I strained every nerve & collected all I could – and borrowed a considerable sum beside to get the sum needed to fulfill my engagement & I am yet some in debt.

Yours respectfully, O. Partridge”

A diary entry from Mrs. Joseph Quincy states: “Among other members of the family, I ought to mention Dr. Partridge, a brother of Mrs. Sergeant. He was an old bachelor, and the most complete personification of the character I ever saw. He had a number of patients, and use to ride about on an old pacing horse with saddlebags full of medicine. He was a sensible, humane man, though somewhat of an oddity. He possessed some property, and generally visited and gave professional advice without fee or reward. In dress and appearance, he resembled a Quaker. He was very kind to us young people, and reminded us of Dr. Levet, commemorated by Dr. Johnson; only their sphere of action was so totally different – the one seeking pain and misery in the abodes of poverty, in the crowded parts of London; the other seeking them out among the valleys and mountains of a beautiful country. But still the same simplicity, benevolence and industry marked them both.”[2]

“Many stories are told of his cleverness as a physician, but one that deals with a farmer’s wife who had rheumatism perhaps bears repeating. It was recounted by one of the doctor’s acquaintances: “Dr. Partridge’s great remedy in such cases was friction.... He knew that if he told this patient to sit and rub the knee for one-half hour continuously two or three times a day, she would pooh at him for a quack. He, calling one day, told her he had seen an account of a wonderful cure of rheumatics by a very simple agency, and wished she would try it. She was a farmer’s wife and almost daily had a boiled dinner. He requested her to take the sublimated fat on the underside of the pot lid, and therewith rub her knee for one half hour. She did so and was greatly helped. In telling me this his eye twinkled roguishly as he remarked, “The fat was of no use, but I knew I couldn’t get the rub which I wanted except by playing off the grease as the new-found remedy”[3]

“Dr. Partridge. The old man was in his laboratory, bedroom, etc., among his old tables, bookcase, etc. with shelves of medicines, and scales suspended hard by. He is about 94 and remembered Williams (Capt. Ephraim Williams) well; who he described as a large stout man, who used to often to visit his father, and take him on his knee. He says he remembers the face as if he saw it yesterday, especially the swelling of the ruddy cheeks. His father, Colonel Partridge, was in the service, and despised Abercrombie as a coward. The Dr. remembers seeing a thousand of Abercrombie’s Highlander at Hatfield or some other town where they were billeted. Abercrombie was always trembling with fear of the Indians, and sending out scouts about camp. When Howe fell, Partridge, the Dr. says, was at his side, and his lordship said, “The army has no leader, and is defeated.” [4]



Image of the Indian Burial Ground, 1879

Now we move on to how Oliver Partridge became the caretaker of the Indian Burial Ground in Stockbridge. "The Stockbridge Indians had a burying ground, the care to which they consigned, on leaving the place, to old Mr. Partridge, who keeps it carefully for them. It is in the village, and seems to contain a large number of bodies." [5]

At the Annual Town Meeting on April 4, 1808 it was voted in Article 7: *That the prayer of the petition of John Metoxen respecting the Indian Burial Ground be granted and that so much of said Town Road as be desired by said dotted lines in said petition be discontinued accordingly.*

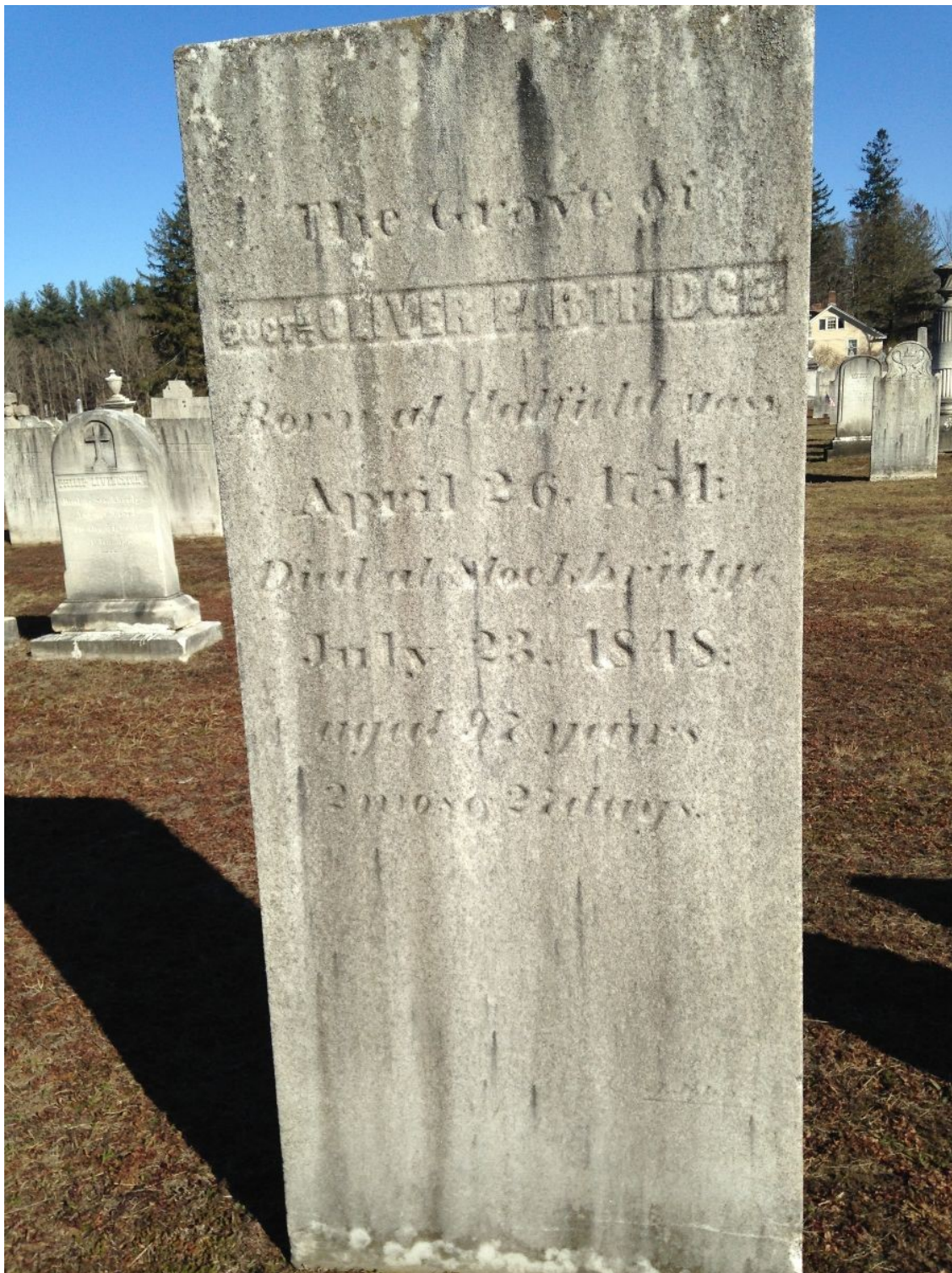
At a Special Town Meeting on May 9, 1808 it was Voted: *That the Town receive and further grant the petition of the Chiefs of Mohekaunuck tribe of Indians as importing the same thing with petition of John Metoxen, granted April last, and order it to be kept on file.*

By 1808 members of the tribe were returning to Stockbridge mostly in the winter, something they did for over thirty years after officially moving to New Stockbridge, New York. It seems likely they learned about the possible road “improvements” from Dr. Partridge. Oliver Partridge seemed an unlikely ally and friend for the Stockbridge Indians given his background and family history, but in 1809 they trusted him enough to deed their burying ground in Stockbridge to his care:

“In consideration of ten dollars in certain services rendered our tribe by and the trust and confidence we place in our friend Oliver Partridge of Stockbridge aforesaid we do for ourselves and for our whole tribe hereafter relinquish to him our right to a certain piece of land lying in Stockbridge there called the Indian Burying Ground lying west of the Town Square there so called and is fully described on their Town records reference thereto to be had which ground never has before by any of us or our forefathers been sold or any ways relinquished. That he may fence the same, that he may in every way prevent the soil from being removed, that the bones of our Ancestors may there lie undisturbed, that he may plant trees round and over the same which trees are ever to be considered as the property of said Oliver his heirs or assigns and improve the same in any way except tilling or breaking up the sod or turf.... “

From Beer’s 1885 History of Berkshire County, we have a final thought to share about Dr. Oliver Partridge:

“His mind held out to the last. Only four weeks before his death his deposition was taken by one of his lawyers, and his memory was so accurate that he would not sign it until it was altered to conform exactly to what he had told the party some months previously. Even when he was more than ninety-five years old he corresponded with an eminent physician concerning a case of some doubt. Thus with quiet diligence, he passed more than three-quarters of a century in the cure of disease and the study of natural history, possessing always the love and confidence of his fellow men, and died after having enjoyed more happiness than falls to the common lot of men.”



Above, Dr. Oliver Partridge's gravestone

[1] From Harvey W. Partridge's, 1909 pamphlet titled Oliver Partridge, Eagle Printing and Binding

[2] A Gentlewoman of the days of the Revolution: Extract from the Diary of Mrs. Joseph Quincy, describing a visit to Madam Dwight of Stockbridge in 1786.

[3] History of Berkshire County, volume II

[4] Francis Parkman Henry Dwight Sedgwick, 1904, page 119

[5] The Journals of Francis Parkman, Volume I, Edited by Mason Wade, 1947. Page 260 (1844 trip to Stockbridge)



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