



The Dennett Home on Powow Hill

by

Scott Dennis

Great-Grandson of Moses Dennett

Amesbury Carriage Museum
Amesbury, Massachusetts

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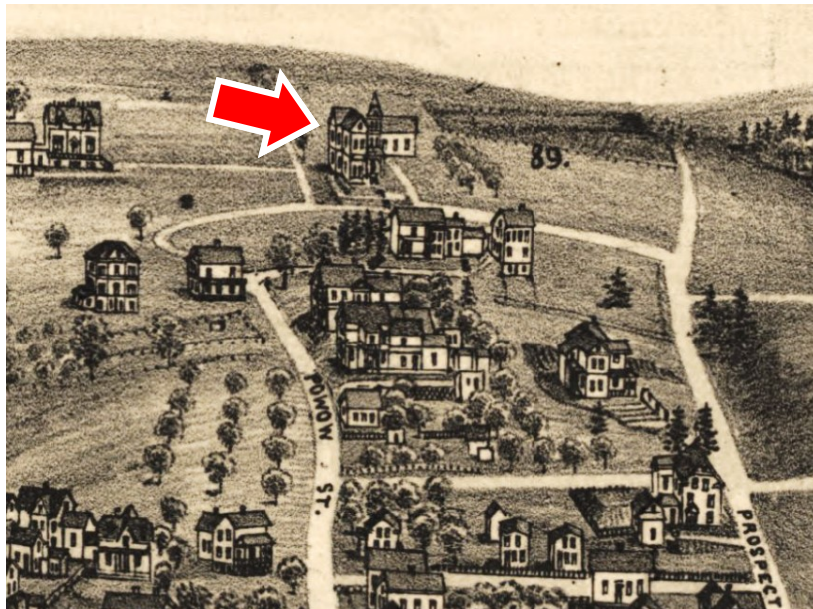
Great-Grandson of Moses Dennett

History of the Dennett House on Powow Hill

On the border of the Merrimac, some eight or ten miles from the ocean, there rises a steep eminence called Powow Hill. It is a landmark to the skippers of the coasting craft that sail up Newburyport harbor, and strikes the eye by its abrupt elevation and orbicular shape, the outline being as regular as if struck off by the sweep of a compass. It obtained the name from the Pagan ceremonial of the aborigines; for, in ancient times, ere our worthy and pious ancestors routed these heathen from the land, the hill in question was the grand high-place of Indian worship, and the nocturnal powwows held upon its summit were the terror and abomination of the whole neighborhood. While the savages lingered in these parts, they never failed, annually, to assemble on this consecrated mount and practice their mysterious orgies, greatly to the scandal and annoyance of all the Christian folk that dwelt roundabout – they having a pious horror of the practice of powwowing, denounced by Cotton Mather as damnable and demoniacal. Even when the last of the red men had disappeared from the country, the scene of their mystic incantations continued to be regarded with profound awe. A spirit of the Pagan mysteries dwelt about the spot; strange sights were seen; a marvelous legend was current – but let me not anticipate. (“Powow Hill, A Legend of Essex County” New England Magazine, 1832, Vol. 2 , pp. 416-17.)

Finding the Dennett house on Powow Hill in Amesbury should be easy. Moses and his wife Jennie lived there for the latter half of their lives and raised their family there. Amesbury City Directories place him at 72 Powow Street from 1891 on, and, for any one of our parents or their generation, its location was intrinsic knowledge. For descendants like me who had never been there, however, the search was made more challenging by two facts: The house on Powow Street was renumbered at one point, probably in conjunction with new houses being built, and the mortgage for the house was in Jennie’s name, not Moses’. That said, a vital clue emerged from Jon Howe’s “Owed to Dennett” transcripts of taped family reminiscences of the Dennetts—a reference to Moses’ study being in a “tower room” in the house. (Other family stories herein come from this valuable transcript unless otherwise noted.) Another clue was a newspaper article’s description of the house as the last one before Batchelder Park at the top of Powow Hill.

Looking at the amazing 1890 lithographic map of Amesbury below, with its zoomable, panoramic view and perspective drawing of buildings, only one house on the hill has a tower, and it was at that time the highest house on the hill. To the right of the house is the number “89,” the indexed entry for the “Reservoir, Powow Hill.” That site still serves the same purpose today in the form of water tanks. Further research determined that this tower house was Moses’ house and that it still stands as 83 Powow Street. (See “Appendix I: Powow Street Number Change” on page 11.)



The Dennett House (arrow) on an 1890 3D map of Amesbury, identifiable by its tower. From Norris, George E, and Burleigh Litho. *Amesbury, Mass.* Brockton, Mass, 1890. Map. Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov/item/75694542/>. (Clip is from top/right-center of map.)

By 1890 Moses and Jennie had been living in their new house for almost three years. They had purchased the land in 1886 from George E. Batchelder, their soon to be neighbor, and Moses’ good friend and Civil War comrade from the 48th Regiment. 1887 newspaper articles talk about Moses planning to build a house on Powow Hill and starting to build it in July 1887: “M. M. Dennett has started the foundation for a house and barn on Powow Hill” (*Amesbury News* July 29, 1887, p. 2.) The family moved into the 8 room house in November of 1887 following the *Amesbury and Salisbury Villager’s* eloquent announcement of its completion on September 8th.

AMESBURY'S GROWTH.

Reflections on the Brow of Powow Hill. — The New Buildings in Town.

Who can live in Amesbury these pleasant days and not feel drawn to the top of Powow Hill? Gazing from its summit upon the wide-awake town, which in its aspirations has almost climbed to the gazer's very feet, one must feel that our youthful and vigorous town will soon reach the dignity of a city.

Up on the crest of this celebrated hill is the new residence of M. M. Dennett, with accompanying stable, both constructed this season. All about the town lies the present season's structures upon which builders in every department have been busy as they never were before.

Announcement of the completion of the new Dennett residence on the crest of Powow Hill. *Amesbury Salisbury Villager*, September 8, 1887.

There were several reasons that the Dennett's moved to Powow Hill. A family story relates that Jennie suffered from asthma and Moses wanted to move her to Powow Hill where the air would be cleaner, perhaps attesting to the poor air quality of downtown Amesbury and its mills. Second, they were pushed by the need for more space with the birth of their second daughter Sallimae (my grandmother) in 1887, who joined her 5-year-old sister Jennibelle and adopted 10-year-old brother Herbert. Third, the chance to live next to his Civil War buddy who had land to offer him would have been hard for him to pass up. Finally, Moses' carriage business was thriving and he had the means to buy a house. Perhaps to keep it separate from his business, the mortgage for the house was put in Jennie's name.

The property is described as "Way from Powow St. to Summit of Powow Hill", an extensive holding. The house appears again in a *Boston Post* article ("The Town of Amesbury," March 16, 1891, p. 8. Thanks to the current owner of the house for pointing me to this source.) The Dennett home is in the left foreground with the roof of the "tower" and its elaborate lightning rod visible behind the main roof. Jennie was terrified of lightning, so Moses made sure that the house had a good lighting rod, as well he might: at 331 feet Powow Hill is the tallest point in Amesbury. The barn to the rear of the house is not shown.



The Dennett house in an 1891 *Boston Post* article.

Moses and Jennie would continue to raise their family and live in the house for over 40 years. After their deaths in 1930, the family rented it out for several years. In 1935 their renters turned it into the Brooks Convalescent Home. It was finally sold in November, 1943, following the death that year of Alexander Brown, Moses' son-in-law.



A Google Maps view of 72 (now 83) Powow Street undergoing renovation.



The remodeled Dennett house as it looks today still sporting its distinctive lightning rod (Amesbury online assessors database, <http://gis.vgsi.com/amesburyma/Parcel.aspx?Pid=1399>). (Moses, coincidentally, was town Assessor from 1908-1910.)

The short, graveled street in front of the house eventually became known as Dennett Avenue, which is listed, instead of 72 Powow Street, as Moses' address in the 1925 City Directory, for example. Dennett Avenue does not show up today on Google Maps, but one can find the name referenced in the Amesbury City Directory street index as late as 1959 (the most recent online directory).



Dennett Avenue referenced in the Amesbury city directory street index in 1959.

Dennett Way, on Google Maps, at least, is a driveway to the municipal water tanks at the rear of the old Dennett property. It is fitting that the street in front of the house became known as Dennett Avenue because it was Moses and his friend who planned it during the construction of the Dennett house: "George E. Batchelder and Moses M. Dennett are laying out a new street running through their property from Powow street to the extension of Prospect st." (*Amesbury News*, Aug. 19, 1887, p. 2.)



Google Maps aerial view of the Dennett house, 83 Powow Street. The street between Powow and Prospect is not named on Google Maps but is known as Dennett Avenue.

The Dennetts' Life on Powow Hill

In 1887, Moses, Jennie and family, having built a lovely Victorian house on the top of Powow Hill moved there from 49 Market Street. Though only a little over a half mile away, it was a move from the city to the country. They had been at the center of town, just 100 yards from Market Square with its water trough and the gritty air of the textile mills. Now they were climbing 300 feet to the highest point in Amesbury and a house in a rural setting with extensive grounds and splendid views to the east of the Atlantic Ocean and, on a clear day, the Isles of Shoals.



Moses and Jennie in front of their barn on Powow Hill, late '20s. Note the straw behind them, suggesting that they still had at least one horse. (Photo courtesy of Doug Frazier.)

A review in the *Newburyport Daily News* (June 26, 1891, p. 3) of a reception for the Daughters of Rebekah (female auxiliary to the Odd Fellows) suggests how idyllic the Dennett's Powow hill home could be. In fact, they did their fair share of entertaining in their home. Just one month after they moved in the Woman's Relief Corps, an auxiliary of the E. P. Wallace Post, G. A. R., surprised them with a celebration and the gift of a beautiful tea set. "Mr. Dennett responded to the presentation speech in words so fitting that none were left in doubt as to their hearty appreciation of this pleasant visit." (*Amesbury and Salisbury Villager*, Dec. 29, 1887, p. 5.)

It was less than a mile to Moses' factory and one of his great-grandchildren, Judy Frazier, remembers her mother telling her that Moses walked down the hill to work and back up each day. Powow Hill was steep. If he took a carriage, as Tom Pendergast of the Amesbury Carriage Museum put it: "I wouldn't want to be the horse."

FRIDAY, JUNE 27, 1891.

AMESBURY.

Daughters of Rebekah Entertained.

Yesterday afternoon and last evening the members of Colfax Lodge, No. 59, Daughters of Rebekah, were entertained by Mr. and Mrs. M. M. Dennett at their beautiful home on Powow hill. The ladies went in the afternoon and had a pleasant social visit together, as only ladies can, and in the evening the gentlemen came.

Mr. and Mrs. Dennett literally kept open house. Everything was free and informal. You came and went about the house and grounds at will. Mr. Dennett's residence is one of the pleasantest and most sightly places in town, and commands a view not only of the whole of Amesbury, but Hampton, Seabrook, Salisbury, Newburyport, old ocean and its lines of beaches clear around from Hampton to Cape Ann, the Isles of Shoals, and with a glass Gloucester and Danvers, and we don't know how much more. The grounds are prettily laid out and in a clear evening like that of last night the effect is beautiful.

As we approached the house the first thing that greeted the eye was a motto in white daisies, "Welcome 59" and the door mats were mats of daisies while the grounds were beautiful with flowers. About 7 o'clock the party entered the house and sat down to a bountiful supply of strawberries, fresh picked from their own garden, cake, ice cream and coffee. After supper the party went out side again about the grounds or seated on the piazza, it being too pleasant to remain in doors and spent the evening in a genuine good social time with singing and general enjoyment until a late hour. Before the party broke up a vote of thanks was unanimously tendered the generous host and hostess for their entertainment. The party present numbered between 50 and 60 persons. It was one of the best times it has been our pleasure to enjoy for a long time.

A report of a reception for the Daughters of Rebekah in the *Newburyport Daily News* of June 26, 1891, describes the idyllic setting of the Dennett's Powow hill home.

In the summers the Dennetts would host their grandchildren at their house on the Hill. As Sallie Howe Gordon Bixby (Moses' granddaughter) remembered:

We usually left Amherst as soon as school was out. Dennett and John [her brothers] would go to spend much of the summer with Grandma Howe at the farm in Nashua, while Mother [Jennibelle Dennett Howe] and I would spend several weeks with the grandparents in Amesbury. Grandpa Dennett tended his large vegetable and flower gardens, and in the afternoons would sit with his Civil War companion, George Batchelder, in the breezeway – smoking their pipes and swapping stories as they looked across to the Isles of Shoals. Grandma had her needlework, and in the parlor both a piano and an organ which she played less and less as her hands became less agile with age. And there were always vegetables from the garden to be canned and stored. Nothing was wasted. Life had taught her to be frugal and resourceful. I really believe that if necessary she could actually 'make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.' And she was indeed proof of the right woman behind her successful man, whom she lovingly referred to as "Mr. D."

During one visit in May, Moses' grandson Dennett Howe, desperate for a taste of strawberries from the extensive garden beside the house, partook of green strawberries and spent the last night with a stomach ache. His mother asked him why in the world he would eat green strawberries. The answer: "because I wouldn't be there when they got ripe!"

Winters were another story. High winds would rattle the house, and Powow Street would become even more difficult to negotiate. Returning from a sales trip just as the blizzard of 1888 was at its worst, Moses had to crawl on his hands and knees in places to get to the top of Powow Hill. The house rocked and shook so badly that Jennie said if she lived through that night, she'd never stay another. But of course she did. As they got older, Moses and Jenny took winter refuge in town or lived part time with their daughter Sally and her husband Alexander Brown and their family on the Point Shore by the Merrimac River in Amesbury or went to Amherst to stay with their daughter Jennibel and her husband William F. Howe and their family.

Moses enjoyed fishing with his buddy George at Lake Gardner at the foot of Powow Hill and at Clark's Pond. One such outing led to an article in the *Newburyport Daily News* touting his fishing prowess.

Large Pickerel.

Last Saturday afternoon, at the pond above Powow station, M. M. Dennett caught a pickerel measuring two feet in length and weighing four pounds. Mr Dennett has a record for catching large fish, having previously captured a pickerel five and a half pounds weight.

Moses Dennett's two-foot, four-pound pickerel recorded in the September 1, 1891, *Newburyport Daily News*.

Moses was said to have one of the finest collections of roses in town, and his flowers lasted two weeks beyond those that had gotten frostbitten down in the town. Jennie was very creative and talented. In addition to doing beautiful needlework, she made flowers of fine wax, painting them in natural colors to be kept under glass. A master seamstress and embroiderer, Jennie was never without her handwork.

Not all was flowers and fishing, however. It was from Powow Hill just 5 months after they had moved into their new house, on the evening of April 5, 1888, that Moses and his family heard the Babcock steam whistle, and looked out to see the glow from the cataclysmic Carriage Hill fire. Moses quickly hitched up his horse Topsy and sped downtown to find his factory in flames along with most of the others on Carriage Avenue. By midnight his factory had been burned completely to the ground. According to Sally Howe Gordon Bixby: "From the breezeway, Grandma and the children watched the tragedy. When Grandpa returned he said, 'Well, Jennie, we have lost everything.' And her answer was, 'No, Moses, we still have the children.' "

By 1928, Moses was housebound by prostate surgery. His beloved Jennie died in the house January 6, 1930, after more than 60 years of marriage, and Moses followed her just one month later, on 7 February. His granddaughter Sally, who worshipped him, was still saddened in her 90's by the circumstances. She had been called home from college when Moses was failing, and took the train from Boston to Newburyport and then to Aunt Sally Dennett Brown's house on the Point Shore. "I wanted very much for Uncle Alex to take me right up to my grandfather's. And he said, 'Well, it's late tonight, we'll go in the morning, everything will be all right, and so forth.' But that was too late. He died, alone. Only the young couple was there." (Moses was being cared for at 72 Powow Street by the Paxtons.)

The funeral services for both Jennie and Moses were held at their home. Moses, who was buried in Mount Prospect Cemetery with full military honors, may have been dressed in his Civil War uniform for the funeral. Descendants aren't sure, and another recollection has his uniform "still up in his study . . . in the tower room." The Paxtons left shortly after his death, and at some point the house was vandalized and partially burned, and some of Moses' Civil War paraphernalia stolen. During recent renovations of the house, however, a ledger book was found that turned out to be a record of Moses' carriage sales.



Moses' ledger book of carriage sales, and his signature on the frontispiece. Found during recent renovations of his Powow Hill house.

Appendix I: Powow Street Number Change

A recent deed proves that the current 83 Powow Street was formerly 72 Powow Street, Moses' address. It also references Jennie Dennett's agreements with neighbors, including "a right-of-way to pass and re-pass with a team or otherwise."

Please return to:
Edward & Angela Campbell
83 Powow Street
Amesbury, MA 01913

5/4/01 01:59 PM Inst. 448
BK17152 PG172

25


Quit Claim Deed

Leonard J. Shenkman of 83 Powow Street, Amesbury Massachusetts, 01913 in consideration of Two Hundred Twenty Four Thousand, Nine Hundred dollars (\$224,900.00) grants to Edward S. Campbell and Angela W. Campbell, as husband and wife, as Tenants by the Entirety, with Quit Claim Covenants, the land in Amesbury, Essex County, Massachusetts, with the buildings thereon situated at 83 Powow Street Amesbury, (formerly known as 72 Powow Street) on a passageway or street leading from Powow Street to the summit of Powow Hill and bounded and described as follows: Southwesterly by said passageway or Street 117 feet, Northwesterly by land now or formerly of Victoria A. Bachelder 132 feet, Northeasterly by land now or formerly of Victoria A. Bachelder 117 feet, and Southeasterly by land now were formerly of Victoria A. Bachelder 132 feet. With a right of way to pass and repass over the above-mentioned passageway or street with a team or otherwise as occasion may require. Subject to the reservation contained in the deed from Victoria A. Bachelder to Jennie M. Dennett, dated May 28, 1889.

Property: 83 Powow Street, Amesbury

Also a right-of-way to pass and repass with a team or otherwise as occasion may require over a street or passageway laid out on the southerly side of a certain parcel of land now or formerly of Victoria A. Bachelder in said Amesbury on Powow Hill and bounded as follows: Northerly by other land now or formerly of said Victoria A. Bachelder, Westerly by land now or formerly of said Jennie M. Dennett, and land now or formerly of Victoria A. Bachelder; Southerly by other land now or formerly of said Victoria A. Bachelder, and Easterly by land now or formerly of Samuel Rowell and Samuel Rowell, Jr.; said right-of-way being from land now or formerly of said Jennie M. Dennett to a road laid out by Samuel Rowell and Samuel Rowell, Jr., over the above described passageway on land now or formerly of said Victoria A. Bachelder. Being the right-of-way contained in the deed from Victoria A. Bachelder to Jennie M. Dennett dated October 29, 1888 and recorded with Essex South District Registry of Deeds in Book 1243, Page 436.

For my title see deeds recorded with said Registry of Deeds in Book 9009, Page 345. and Book 9334, Page 418.


Leonard J. Shenkman

State of Connecticut
Hartford County S. S. Farmington May 3, 2001

The deed confirming that 83 Powow Street, the site of the Dennett house, was formerly numbered 72 Powow Street. <https://saleddeeds.com/saleddeeds/ImageDetail.aspx?stype=recdoc&machine=&year=2001&month=5&day=4&docnum=448&seqnum=%20&book=17152&page=172&clearpostback=true>

The Victoria Batchelder mentioned in the deed was the wife of George E. Batchelder, Moses' neighbor on Powow Hill, and, more importantly, his comrade at arms in the 48th Massachusetts Volunteer Regiment during the Civil War. They were lifelong friends and fellow post members at the E. P. Wallace G.A.R. Post in Amesbury, where both were very active. George and Moses used to sit in the breezeway (likely an area between Moses' house and barn) smoking their pipes and sharing war stories. In 1923, George gifted the town land at the top of Powow Hill for a park to be dedicated to the memory of his wife.

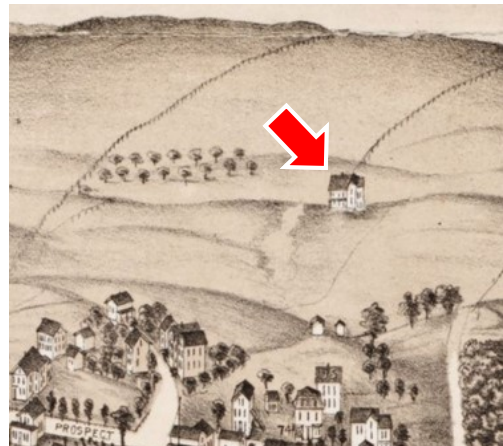
Samuel Rowell, Jr., whose house was at the head of Arlington Street to the east of the Dennett property, was a fellow carriage maker. After the Carriage Hill fire, Moses worked out of the Samuel Rowell & Son factory at 28 Water Street until 1890.

1912	June 28	Jennie E. (ux Irving O.)	- Citizens' Co-op. Bk.	Mtge.	2154	264	Haverhill	(Bradford) Leroy Av. Lot 28 Pl. May 1, 1899
1923	Dec. 11	" " et al	- (Notice of cond. bill of sale)		2581	537	"	" " " "
1926	Feb. 8	" " "	- (Dis. of Not. of cond. bill of sale)		2671	3	"	See B. 2581 P. 537
1887	Sept. 28	" M. (ux Moses M.)	- Amesbury Co-op. Bk.	Mtge.	1206	421	Amesbury	Way from Powow St. to Summit of Powow Hill
"	Dec. 10	" " " " "	- Salisbury & Amesbury Prov.)	"	1213	159	"	" " " " " " " "
			Instn. for Sav.)					

Portion of a Registry of Deeds document showing the mortgage for the Powow Hill house in Jennie Dennett's name. (<https://salemdeeds.com/salemdeeds/BPIndex.aspx?stype=index&indexpath=TOR1880-1940%5c29&indexbook=TOR1880-1940&indexpage=28&indexgroup=26>) In an interesting coincidence, one of the original mortgages (last line) was taken out with the Salisbury & Amesbury Providence Institution for Savings, a bank run in 1887 by Azor Webster II, President, and Alfred C. Webster, Treasurer. These were the great-grandfather and grandfather of Boyd Jones, who would marry Moses' granddaughter Nancy Brown.)

Appendix II: Mysterious Farmhouse on 1880 Map

An 1880 E. H. Bigelow map, pointed out by the current owner of the Dennett house, creates a mystery because it shows a farmhouse apparently with a tower room in approximately the location of Moses' future house; but it cannot be that house, which did not exist until 1887. The map captures the rural nature of the upper reaches of Powow Hill in the 1880's, with extensive fields, orchards and fences and no formal road.



An 1880 map shows a house (arrow) with a tower room on the approximate site of the Dennett house seven years before the Dennett house was built. E. H. Bigelow, "Amesbury and Salisbury Mills Mass. 1880" (Framingham Mass). From the Boston Public Library digital collections.