

The Edison-Dougherty House in Caldwell, NJ

John Edison, the loyalist great-grandfather of Thomas A. Edison, owned property in what is now Caldwell, NJ from about 1771 until he and wife Sarah left for Nova Scotia in 1783. A house at 75 Elm Rd in Caldwell NJ, also known as the “Edison-Dougherty” house, is known as Edison’s site. Below is a summary of the subsequent ownership of his property from pre-1796 to the present, with some new information based on the original deeds.

David Addison, May, 2018

Prior to 1771: John Edison acquired 53 acres of land in the Horseneck Tract, present day Caldwell, NJ. No record has been found regarding his acquisition of the land. John married Sarah Ogden in 1765 and records indicate they resided first on Sarah's father Samuel Ogden's land in what is now Roseland, N.J. But by 1771 they had acquired their own property in the Horseneck Tract.

See Overlay Map

1771 John Edison mortgaged his 53 acres to a group of individuals¹ in order to acquire funds. Boundaries of his land are defined in this mortgage deed. Acreage was/is located North East and adjacent to the Caldwell Presbyterian Church “Parsonage Land.”

Family Search Mortgages, v. A 1766-1822 Film 947864; DGS 8217650 ; Image 61

1774 John’s 53 acres are shown in the 1774 Horseneck map done by Thomas Milledge.

See 1774 map

1775 The first location of John Edison’s house is identified in a survey of an adjacent property done for David Ogden Esq. The house was located in Caldwell, NJ very close to the intersection of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd (the “Old Road”), on the western corner.

NJ Archives S7(EJ Surveys): folio 273-274

1783 John Edison abandoned his property and fled with his family to Nova Scotia as a Loyalist.

1785 From 1783 until 1785, John’s 53 acres were tied up in Essex County court by his creditors² seeking payment for debts incurred by John. One court transcript describes John’s land as “now being in possession of Lt. John Crane and Moses Campbell.” They don’t appear to be official owners but possibly court appointed caretakers. The properties of loyalists were being confiscated by the State during this time so there may have been a dual interest in John’s land, one from his creditors and one from potential property owners. In June 1785 the court ordered the land to be sold no earlier than Jan 1787.

Essex County Court Records

1787-1796: Sometime between 1787 and 1796, Joseph Felt, acquired at least 20 of John’s 53 acres, and is the owner of record in 1796. This 20 acres was the southern part of the 53 acres and included the location of John’s house. Could Joseph Felt have owned the land since 1787?

Little information has been found regarding Joseph’s identity. The name Felt does not appear to be common around Caldwell at that time. There were at least two Revolutionary War veterans

1 The mortgage lists the following as the mortgagors. William Earl of Sterling, John Reid, Walter Rutherford, Cornelius Hetfield, Francis Post. and William Crane.

2 The Plaintiff is identified as Reid et al so it may be the same group to whom John had mortgaged his land in 1771.

of that name from New England. One from Massachusetts, son of Aaron Felt, was captured by the British at Fort Washington, New York and imprisoned for a time. Might he have been given preference in buying the land because of his service?

Family Search Deeds, v. H 1803-1804 Film 911903; DGS 8217631; Image 238

- 1796 Joseph Felt sells his 20 acres to Moses Kent by a Deed of Conveyance. From my understanding, this type of deed was an official but less formal property transfer between two parties, something like a signed IOU.

There was a Moses Kent 1762-1828, the son of a Hendrick Kent who owned property in Horseneck next door to John Edison. There was also a Moses Kent who was a friend of Gouverneur Morris, member of the Constitutional Convention. I'm not sure if they are the same person.

- 1797 Moses Kent sells the same 20 acres to David Dobbins (1762-1820).

Family Search Deeds, v. H 1803-1804 Film 911903; DGS 8217631; Image 238
See Overlay Map

- 1820 David Dobbins died intestate in 1820. The administrators of his estate were his sons, David L. Dobbins, Isaac Dobbins and John G. Dobbins. A sister, Hannah Y Dobbins was also a survivor and there is more about her later.

Administration of will

- 1820-1850 This period was a time of increased land development, speculation and subdivision due to population expansion so that the original 53 and 20 acre parcels were now being sub-divided into smaller 5 to 10 acre parcels. The Dobbins children inherited their father's property, the 20 acres of John's original land. One family that acquired considerable acreage in the north and east was headed by Noah Baldwin, and the Dobbins and the Baldwins were not only close neighbors, but were also connected by inter-marrying.

The Dobbins and the Baldwins each owned properties at the intersection of Mountain Ave and what is now Elm Road in Caldwell. The Dobbins extended family retained their original part of John Edison's acreage and it was located on the "west side" of the intersection. The Baldwins owned parcels on the "east side" of the intersection, and also north of the Dobbins.

The Mountain Ave/Elm Rd intersection was/is on the eastern boundary of the old Horseneck Tract. However, the Horseneck boundary went north from the intersection at a bearing of N30E which means it went north at an angle of 30 degree east of true north.

- 1850-1890 During this time a number of the "second generation" Dobbins children settled on the 20 acres of John's former property, on the west side of the Mountain Ave / Elm Road intersection and began raising their own families. Later US Census records show three or four heads of Dobbins families living close to each other at the west intersection of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd (called "the old road" in the 1900 census) The Census records also indicate each family in separate dwellings by now, the original 20 acres having been subdivided many times. Noah Baldwin (above) had a son Noah O. Baldwin (1816-1899) who lived nearby and he was very active in acquiring properties in the area. Noah was an influential farmer and

businessman. Later in life he was part of an initiative to create the Caldwell Railway Company. It is not known whether his interest in acquiring property was personal or because of his interest in the railroad. Probably both. And in 1859 Noah O. Baldwin conveyed 26 acres to his brother Marcus Y. Baldwin. The boundary description for Marcus' property is not specific but the 1891 map shows Marcus Baldwin's property on the east side of the Mountain Ave/ Elm Road intersection.

See 1891 Map

1890-1905 By 1890 there were a few significant changes that disrupted the Dobbins' ownership of the properties on the west corner of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd. This had to have happened because we know from history that a member of the Baldwin family ended living at the location of the Edison-Dougherty house on Elm road which was in "Dobbins Neighborhood." Some of the reasons for these property transactions were as follows.

One, the general population was expanding creating a need for housing, and so selling the "old homestead" and subdividing became more commonplace. In fact, the censuses of that time began to show individuals whose career was "real estate." One of the Dobbins families moved from Caldwell to Verona for example.

Secondly, the heads of these "second generation" Dobbins families began to die which usually meant that a spouse or children made decisions regarding ownership of the dwelling and property. In one case, the surviving spouse of a Hannah Dobbins was a Joseph V Baldwin and this situation was one way the Baldwins became owners of part of John's property.

Thirdly, as the "second generation" heirs to David Dobbins original 20 acres died off, the heir who lived the longest often inherited the properties of the other deceased siblings, and ended up making the final decision regarding the properties. In this case it fell to a Samuel S Dobbins who died in 1895 but who in 1892 had sold a significant property to the Caldwell Land Company, and the western boundary of this land was the "parsonage land" of the Caldwell Presbyterian Church, which boundary was also the western boundary of John Edison's original property. So we know this 15 acres partially overlapped the 20 acres of John's land sold to David Dobbins in 1797.

Deeds H26-I26 909847 8354790 118

The Caldwell Land Company to which Samuel Dobbins sold property is thought to be the real estate arm of the Caldwell Railway Company which was an initiative in 1890-1892 to establish a rail service between Montclair and Caldwell. The initiative was chartered and financed by the New York Suburban Land Company and the Presbyterian Church of Caldwell. And the Treasurer of the Caldwell Railway was none other than Noah O Baldwin. So it is surmised that Noah O. Baldwin came into possession of this 15 acres of John Edison's original property in Horseneck through his position with the railway. This property was located on the "west side" (the Dobbins' side) of the Mountain Ave /Elm Rd intersection.

Also during this time, prior to his death in 1904, Marcus Y. Baldwin (1823-1904) conveyed his property (presumably that which his brother Noah had given him) to his son-in-law Phineas A. Matthews. (1844-1930)

A Puritan Heritage: The First Presbyterian Church in Horse-Neck (Caldwell, N.J.), 1955, p.65

The exact transaction that brought 75 Elm Rd from the Dobbins to the Baldwins is probably

one or more of the above transactions by Noah Baldwin. The deeds of that time are rather vague. But we do know that the exchange happened because of the following records:

- 1895 New Jersey Census: The Phineas Matthews family, including his father-in-law, Marcus Y Baldwin, is living two doors from David F Dobbins.
- 1900 U.S. Census: Phineas Matthews and family living are living on “Old Road” (Elm Rd), Caldwell, next door to two families of Dobbins.
- 1905 New Jersey Census: Phineas Matthews and family living on “Old Road” Elm Rd, Caldwell, next door to the same two Dobbins families.
- 1910 U.S. Census: Phineas Matthews and family lived on what looks like Bloomfield, with no Dobbins as neighbors.
- 1915 New Jersey Census: Phineas Matthews family lived at 65 Elm Rd Caldwell. Next house is numbered 45 Elm Rd. No Dobbins families as neighbors. And no 75 Elm Rd in the census.
- 1920 U.S. Census: Phineas Matthews family lived at 65 Elm Rd. Next house on one side is 45. Next house on other side is 56. No 75 Elm Rd. in the census.
- 1930 U.S. Census: Phineas Matthews family lived at 45 Elm Rd. There is no 75 Elm Rd. in census. Phineas died in 1930, and his wife Emma died in 1940
- 1940 US Census: Elsie Matthews, (youngest daughter of Phineas, not married) 1893-1982 lived with her parents at 65 and 45 Elm Rd in 1920 and 1930, but lived at 75 Elm Rd in 1940 and afterwards. Elsie was a Realtor/Insurance Salesperson as a career. See Google Maps to locate these addresses in relation to Mountain Ave.
(Census and City Directory)
- 1982 The next owners of the property at 75 Elm were the Doughertys. I would assume that sometime near the date of Elsie’s death in 1982, that the house was bought by them. Hence the “Edison-Dougherty House” description.

Findings:

1. The boundaries of John Edisons 53 acres in Horseneck can be identified quite accurately in terms of present day streets in Caldwell, N.J. The 1774 map by Milledge and the deeds of 1797 are very helpful in this regard. In present day Caldwell, John’s Western boundary would be Erwin Pl. and at the same angle as Erwin Pl headed North, except it would continue at that same bearing northeastward for a total distance of about one half mile from the southern end of Erwin Pl. The Southern boundary would be Elm Road from near Erwin Pl to the intersection with Mountain Ave. The Eastern boundary would start at the intersection of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd and extend about one half mile northeastward at the same bearing as Erwin Pl (parallel to Erwin Pl.) The Northern border connects the end points of the west and east border about where Hillside Ave dead ends. Mountain Ave crossed John’s land as it went north. The 20 acres acquired by David Dobbins had the same boundaries except that the north boundary ended near Orient Way.

It has been observed on some of the old area maps that a tributary feeder stream of Pine Brook

once flowed northward through John's 53 acre parcel. Two hundred fifty years ago it would have been a roaring brook and a certain attraction to John Edison who has been documented by one biographer as building at least one water dam on another property in the Caldwell area.

2. The location of John's house presents a little dilemma because we now have two locations. The first is the "Edison-Dougherty house" at 75 Elm Rd. The original location of the house has recently been found on a 1775 deed of an adjacent property. The original location is very close to the junction of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd, on the west side of Mountain Ave. The distance between the two locations is approximately 800 feet. However, this may not be a dilemma because local lore has it that the house at 75 Elm Rd, or part of it, was moved there from another location at some time in the past. If that is the case, we now know the original location of John's house. According to the 1775 deed, the location would have been in front of what is now 51 Elm Rd and 47 Elm Rd, but even closer to the actual intersection of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd.

The simplest answer as to "why" the house was moved, is probably because it was in the way of the increasing width of Mountain Ave and Elm Rd. In John's day, Mountain Ave was probably a single cart, dirt path, and the footprint of his house was probably too close to the increasing width of both Mountain Ave and Elm Rd. The current owners of the Edison-Dougherty house have indications that a foundation was built there in 1834 and a renovation happened 1890. So the moving of the house may have been tied to the foundation building in 1834. And in 1834 the Dobbins children would have owned both John's original house and the location to which it was moved (eventually becoming 75 Elm Rd.) So it is likely that one of David Dobbins' children would have been responsible for the move if it took place in 1834. Another person who may have moved the house at a later date is Phineas A. Matthews (1844-1930), son-in-law of Marcus Y Baldwin. His daughter ended up living at 75 Elm Rd. He was the Contractor (Road Engineer) who was responsible for transforming many of Caldwell's early dirt roads into more developed thoroughfares. He would have had the expertise and equipment required to move the house.

3. The findings also indicate that there is no census record of any occupancy at 75 Elm Rd in the 1900's until the 1940 federal census. (Further investigation needs to confirm this fact) That raises a couple questions. What was the status of the property from 1900 to 1940? Had the house come to a state of disrepair? And why did the renovation of 1890 not make the place occupiable by 1900? The occupant in 1940, Elsie Matthews is listed as both a realtor and an insurance saleswoman, and her father Phineas, as mentioned, was a road contractor. Might they have been involved in re-creating the property at 75 Elm Rd? Phineas died in 1930 so might it have been Elsie's project between 1930 and 1940? These questions will have to be the subject of future research.

Conclusion:

1. The findings identify the boundaries of 53 acres once owned by John Edison in Caldwell, NJ.
2. The findings identify the original location of John Edison's original house structure.
3. The findings support the recollection that part of the structure at 75 Elm Road was moved there from its original location.
4. The findings support the rationale for naming the house at 75 Elm Rd the "Edison Dougherty House."

The above represents a continuing inquiry into the history of John Edison's property in Caldwell. New information is being added as it is discovered so that changes can be expected. Of particular interest is the question: How did John Edison acquire the Horseneck property in the first place?

The Family Search deeds can be found on familysearch.com by doing a search in their Catalog for "new jersey land" w/no quotes, and then scrolling to Essex County, Land and Property, and then to Deeds 1688-1901.....

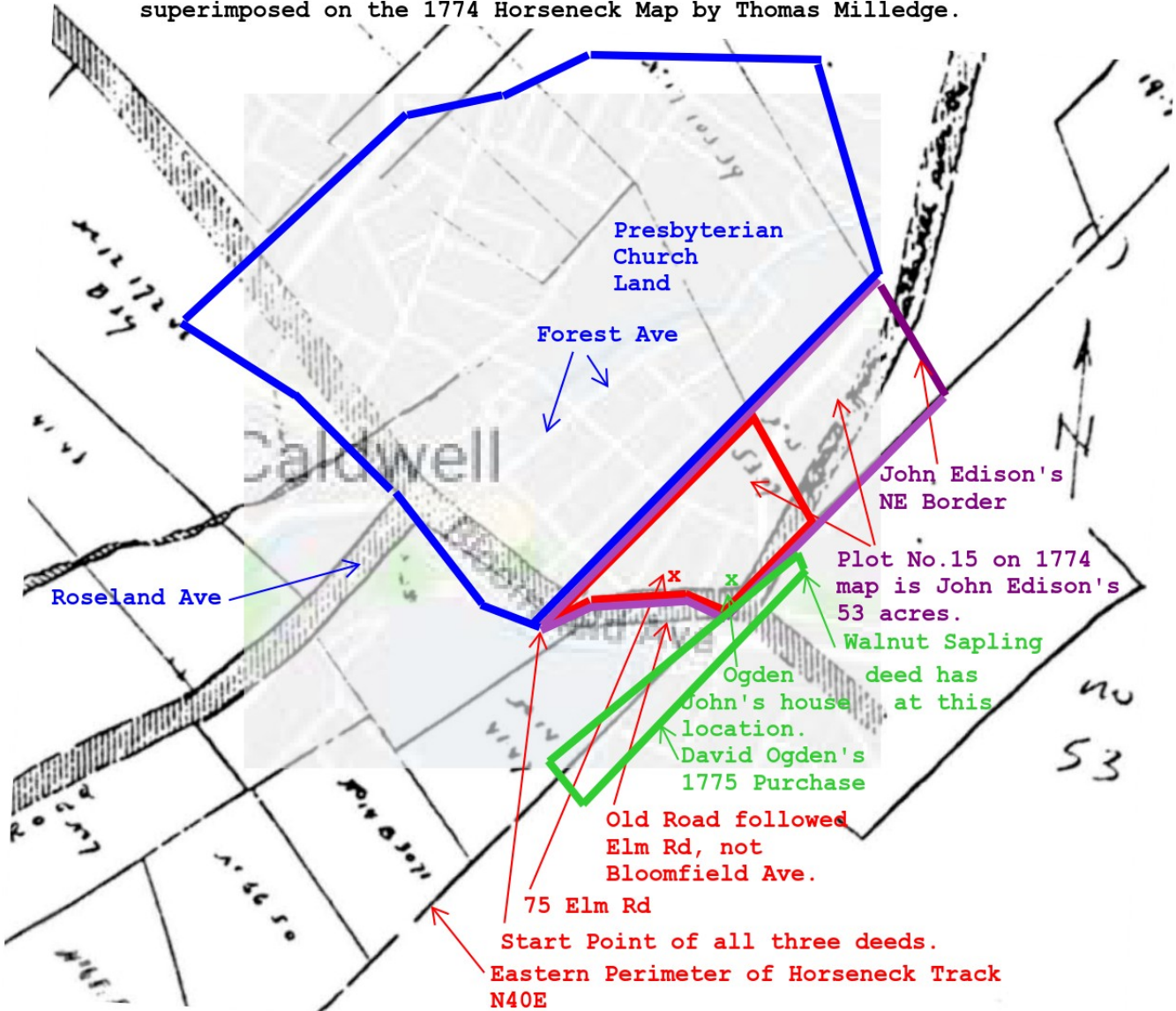
Questions can be directed to D. Addison email: addison5236@yahoo.com



(The two corner marks indicate I am using a "free version" of PDF Xchange Editor. A good program nonetheless.)
David Addison 4/2018



John Edison's (and neighbors) land in Caldwell, NJ 1771-1797. John's land is the purple boundary up against the eastern perimeter of the Horseneck Track. Adjacent to John on the West is the Caldwell Presbyterian Church property in blue. It was called the "Parsonage Land" because the original structure built there functioned as a church and a parsonage. The Red boundary was a segment of John's land sold in 1796. The Background image consists of a present day Google street map superimposed on the 1774 Horseneck Map by Thomas Milledge.



Purple Boundary: 53 acres owned by John Edison as shown on 1774 Milledge Map. A 1771 Mortgage deed is on Family Search with boundary description.

Blue Boundary: 90 acres given to Caldwell Presbyterian Church in 1779. Called the Parsonage Land. Deed is on Ancestry with boundary description.

Red Boundary: 20 acres, Joseph Felt to Moses Kent in 1796; Moses Kent to David Dobbins in 1797. The Deed to Dobbins is on Family Search with a boundary description.

S7(EJ Surveys) folio 273-274: David Ogden's 1775 deed with surveyed identification of John Edison's original house location.

North thirty two degrees and fifteen minutes East thirteen Chains and seventy links to the beginning Containing twenty nine acres and thirty six hundredths of an acre strict measure Also all that Tract of Land in the County of Essex near to Horse Neck lying on both sides the Road leading from Newark to Horse Neck Beginning at a Stake standing on the South East side of a Hill and South east ten links from a Walnut Sapling marked on four sides with a blaze and three Notches said Stake stands North thirty seven degrees and forty five minutes East six Chains and twenty five links from the dwelling House of John Edison and seven Chains and fifty links North thirty two degrees and fifteen minutes East from the Road, said Stake is the reported fourth Corner of a Tract surveyed for the Children of Richard Newfield and from said Stake running (1) South thirty two degrees and fifteen minutes West thirty four Chains thence (2) North sixty three degrees and thirty minutes West nine Chains and ninety links thence (3) North forty degrees and eighteen minutes East thirty five Chains and forty links thence (4) South fifty seven degrees and forty five minutes East four Chains and ninety links to the beginning Containing twenty five acres and twenty nine hundredths of an acre strict measure which Tracts after allowance for highways are to remain for fifty two acres and five hundredths of an acre. to twenty one acres and seventy eight hundredths of an acre of which the said David Ogden has right in full of a Deed to him from Elias Howe for twenty five acres of Land to be taken up in any just unappropriated in the County of Essex on the nineteenth day of May 1775 and recorded in Book A 6 page 245

1891 Map

