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## Houghton-Sprague House: The Houghton-Sprague Farm 1665-1981

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## THE HOUGHTON-SPRAGUE FARM: 1665-1981

by Morrill Sprague

*At last Saturday's Town Meeting, the Conservation Commission received town approval to purchase part of the Sprague farm on Still River Road. Morrill Sprague has contributed the following history of the farm to the Harvard Post.*

At a General Court held in Boston on May 18, 1653, the boundaries of what was at first called the Nashaway Plantation, and which later became the town of Lancaster, were set forth in accordance with the deed purchased by John Prescott from the local Indian Chief Sagamore. The court appointed six "Prudential Men", two of whom were John Prescott and Ralph Houghton, to organize the town. Prescott was one of those named as "Layers-Out of Lands". What were known as "First Division Lands" were the house lots, about 20 acres each along Neck Road, together with meadow land for hay and pasture, and land for cultivation. "Second Division" lands, parcels of several hundred acres each, were then laid out to Ralph Houghton, Major Simon Willard, Joshua Atherton, and others of the original pioneers, and those following.

Ralph Houghton was named the first town clerk, and the first town meetings were held in 1663. The Houghton farm was recorded on December 2, 1665. The original deed was handed down through successive generations of direct heirs of Ralph Houghton and is now in the possession of the present owner of the original Houghton farm, this writer.

The first occupant of the property was James Houghton, son of the original Ralph Houghton. James was named the first tax collector for Lancaster for King William III of England; the original directive from the King's Agents, the General Court of Massachusetts, dated December 1, 1697, is also in my hands. James was the first to live on this property and his first house is reputed in the family to have been a cabin hurriedly put up so that his wife could

have her first baby there. It was replaced by the beginnings of the present house about 1695.

The property was handed down through direct heirs to E. W. Houghton whose only child, Gertrude, predeceased him. He willed the property to my mother, Delia M. Sprague, and his long-time housekeeper, Mary E. Cummings, on March 13, 1912, and my mother bought Miss Cumming's interest on April 13, 1913.

A survey in modern engineering form was done in 1797; it showed some of the farm on West Bare Hill Road set aside to W. Elijah Houghton Jr., who had built and occupied a house there. This house and land later was sold to Abraham Lawrence. My grandfather, John Sprague, married one of Abraham Lawrence's daughters. After Lawrence's and his wife's deaths, John Sprague bought out the other heirs, and with his wife came into possession of the property in 1864. My father, John Franklin Sprague, and I were both born in the original house, which, with the large barn my grandfather had built across the street, is now owned by Donald Baer. After my mother had inherited the Houghton farm, my parents decided to move over the hill to my present home, and sold the Sprague property, including the so-called Bowers farm that my grandfather had bought, to Fiske Warren. Our present farm still includes a considerable part of the land Ralph Houghton bought in 1663, and is a part of the original Nashaway Plantation bought from Chief Sagamore.