"Gumpas" vs. "Gumpus"

An Interesting Discussion of Controversial Spelling of Old Pelham Name

by Harry H. Atwood

For a period of 200 years and more this proper name appeared correctly spelled as G-u-m-p-a-s. That was the accepted way of spelling it.

Just when and for what reason was the spelling in this old historical name—traditional in origin, prominent and frequently mentioned in Pelham records and in business affairs, in the laying out of highways, in the conduct of school district matters, in the writing of old deeds, in the drawing of ancient plans and old maps, and incidentally in many other ways—just why and by what authority was the manner of spelling this proper name, singular only to this section, changed from Gumpas—as originally and then consistently spelled for years, to Gumpus as it now quite frequently appears?

Gumpas Hill, Gumpass Pond, Gumpass Brook, Gumpass Cemetery, Gumpass Road and Gumpass School District all appear and are frequently mentioned throughout Pelham town records, although in recent years but one "s" was used instead of two—that is, one "s" was dropped and the name—more frequently appears spelled as G-u-m-p-a-s.

A 1782 copy of a plan of the original Col. Tyng's grant or purchase of an 850-acre tract in this town was drawn by Caldwell and shows Gumpass Pond accurately located. This copy also contains the 400-acre Endicott grant at Jeremiah's Hill (Jeremy Hill) and the John Scarlet 150-acre tract adjoining, all of which were land specifications of "Lord Proprietors"—the latter grant surveyed and plotted by Jonas Danforth in 1675, who was an authority of high repute during that period. John Butler and Joseph Hamblett, the first settlers in Pelham, located on adjoining lots of 300 acres each purchased out of Col. Tyng's 850 acres, described as in Gumpass Pond vicinity in 1721. This Col. Tyng's lot was probably planned about 1702 by Jonas Danforth, a surveyor of wide experience, and copied by Caldwell. Another surveyor, Solomon Osgood Jr., in his plan of the town of Pelham in 1805 shows Gumpass Pond spelled in this same way. Several later maps and plans of this town show the same manner of spelling—that is, either Gumpas or Gumpas.

From 1746, the year Pelham was incorporated as a town, to 1885, we may find many references to this proper name in town records as applied to the pond, the brook, the district, the cemetery or the highway of such name, and invariably the name appears spelled in this self-same way, and ever since, excepting that in very few instances does it appear as Gumpus. For two centuries the significance of this name was not changed.

However, in 1886 an annual town report gives note of a bill paid for cutting brush in the Gumpus Cemetery. Then, a few years later, a guide board was erected directing the way to Gumpus Pond, and since that time and possibly for that reason, it seems to have grown in public opinion, that G-u-m-p-a-s is really the proper spelling of the word and such form has become quite common. This is clearly in error. Tradition, old history, old records and other accepted authorities, all tell us so.

"G-U-M-P-A-S" is the correct way to spell this proper name. There is no authority or valid reason for spelling it otherwise.