

John Keillor ESQ 1761-1839

PIONEER, PUBLIC SERVANT, JUSTICE OF THE PEACE, JUDGE

In 1773, twelve-year-old John Keillor emigrated from Yorkshire with his parents and siblings to a farm near Fort Beauséjour (then Fort Cumberland). In 1782 he married Elizabeth, daughter of Yorkshire immigrant, John Weldon, and moved to the Memramcook Valley where the Weldons had settled in 1780. In 1786 both he and his father-in-law received land grants from the newly formed Province of New Brunswick and numbered among the first post-Acadian settlers in what would become the village of Dorchester.

While living for several decades in a humble log house on land now occupied by 4962 Main Street, John expanded his original grant by judicious buying, selling and swapping and added his own hard work to build up a prosperous farm that included much of the land in the village from the southeast boundary of the Maritime Penitentiary to just beyond the Joseph Hickman property (5032 Main St.). By 1805 he had a large dairy herd and shipped butter and other farm produce to Saint John by schooner from Dorchester Island.

Although prosperous, John's real mark of distinction was his outstanding service in annually appointed public offices (road commissioner, tax collector, constable, town clerk, etc.) by which the parish—a subunit of the county—was administered. In 1801 he donated four acres for the erection of a courthouse and jail after the original one at Mount Whatley burned. He was thus instrumental in Dorchester's becoming the Shiretown of Westmorland County. In 1805 he was appointed a Justice of the Peace and in 1816 appointed as a Judge on the Inferior Court of Common Pleas, a county level court for civil suits, where he set an outstanding example of devotion to duty until his death.

Growing prosperity enabled him to remodel the log house in 1803 into a home suitable for a gentleman. By 1813 he was ready to build the Georgian-style stone mansion we know as Keillor House. He and his wife Elizabeth, later son Thomas and wife Mary Jane, and lastly (until 1928) his great-granddaughter Edessa Chapman and husband High Sheriff Joseph McQueen lived there in homey elegance, recognized as leading citizens of Dorchester.

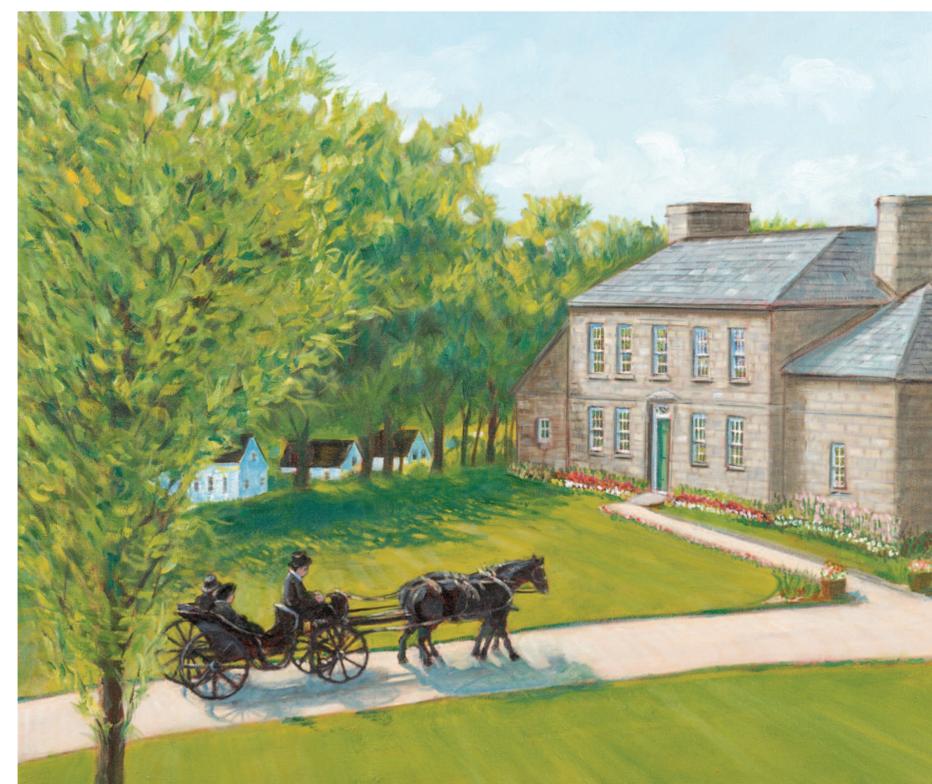


Illustration by Peter Manchester

John & Elizabeth (Weldon) Keillor

Ann	1783-1863	m. David Chapman
Mary	1786-1864	m. John Robb
Elizabeth	1788-1852	m. Nathaniel Gilbert
John, Jr.	1791-1850	m. Mary Ann Riley/Ripley
Margaret	1793-1845	m. Andrew Reed/Reid
Jane	1795-1861-71	m. John Dickie/Dickey
Thomas	1798-1887	m. Mary Jane Moore
Sarah	1801-1870	m. James Long