SEWING BOX OF MERCIE ELDREDGE SOULE, c.1857

By Carolyn Ravenscroft, Archivist & Historian

We recently purchased through auction this wonderful mid-19th century sewing box with a strong Duxbury connection. According to the paper label affixed to the inside, it was made by Lawrence P. Soule (1831–1910) for his new bride, Mercie B. Eldridge (1834–1921). The couple were married in 1857. The box, with its marquetry and inlaid designs, demonstrates Soule's craftsmanship. We imagine Mercie used this box often during their 53 years of marriage.

Lawrence Porter Soule was born in the house at 152 Marshall Street to Capt. Stephen and Lydia (Pierce) Soule. He was a descendant of the Pilgrim George Soule and his branch of the family had lived on Standish Shore since 1773.

Unlike his father and uncles, Lawrence chose to become a mason, rather than a mariner. He clearly had some fine carpentry skills as well.

Mercie B. Eldridge, the recipient of the sewing box, was born in Harwich, MA to Capt. Sylvester and Julia Eldridge. By the time she was five years old, her family had relocated to Duxbury (218 Surplus Street) and Mercie attended the local schools, including the newly established Partridge Academy. Her father was lost at sea in 1852.

In their earliest married days, the Soules lived in Hennepin, Minnesota, but they soon returned to their home state with an infant son, Winthrop. For a short time, they resided in Lawrence's parents' Duxbury house, before moving to Lawrence, MA where Soule could find work as a mason in the growing factory town. They had three more children: Parker (b. 1860), Laura (b. 1869) and Florence (b. 1876). After the Great Boston Fire of 1872, Lawrence became a general contractor in the city. The firm L. P. Soule and Sons was responsible for the construction of numerous buildings, including the Boston Stock Exchange, First National Bank, and Commonwealth Trust. Lawrence and Mercie built their own beautiful brick house at 11 Russell Street in Cambridge, MA.

The Soules were part of the growing summer community in Duxbury at the turn of the last century. They built a home first on Washington Street and then on Powder Point.

The benefits of Dateboarding your house are huge: in addition to the Dateboard plaque and the “bragging rights” you get as a homeowner, information on your house goes on file at the Drew Archival Society. This means that your house history, along with that of other houses, is maintained. The information we hold on the weaving together the different families, experiences and stories of Duxbury. Having a Dateboard on your home comes with absolutely no restrictions on modifications to your home.
Duxbury Gets Gold Fever

By Carolyn Ravenscroft, Archivist & Historian

In 1849, gold was discovered in California and the country’s first Gold Rush was on. Thousands of people, both male and female, were infected with gold fever. Most hoped to strike it rich by mining; but some, more prudent, eyed the prospect of provisioning the prospectors. The booming city of San Francisco also needed laborers of all types to keep pace with its rapid expansion. The movement of so many citizens to the Pacific Coast tipped California into statehood in 1850.

The Forty-Niners’ bought passage aboard ships bound for San Francisco individually or formed ad-hoc mining companies and leased entire vessels. The race to get to California energized the shipbuilding industry in Boston and New York; as larger and faster clipper ships competed for speed records. The clippers of the Winsor Regular Line of Boston, owned by Duxburyite Matthew Mayo, is rumored to have kept pace with its rapid expansion. The “Forty-Niners” bought passage aboard ships owned or captained by Duxbury mariners. The Winsor ships, as well as others, often sailed with Duxbury captained by his brother, Charles. He is rumored to have stuck it rich in the gold mines, only to disappear on his voyage home.

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