

Account of the Naming of the Falls
Excerpts from the Writings of Edward Hitchcock and Epaphras Hoyt

Introduction and Compilation by Jeff Singleton, Montague Historical Commission

Edward Hitchcock (1793-1864) was geologist, a principal of Deerfield Academy, a Congregationalist minister, a professor of “Natural Theology and Geology” and President of Amherst College. He was also the Massachusetts state geologist from 1830 to 1844. He is most famous for the discovery of dinosaur tracks (which he believed were prints of giant birds), research on the glacial lake which covered the Connecticut River valley and now bears his name, and his efforts to square the findings of nineteenth century geological research on the origins of the earth with the bible.

Hitchcock’s papers, along with those of his wife Orra White Hitchcock who was an early botanical artist and illustrator, are in the archives and [special collections of the Amherst College](#)
Bio: http://asteria.fivecolleges.edu/findaids/amherst/ma27_bioghist.html

This discussion of the falls at what is now Turners Falls, is from a report on the Geology of Massachusetts, written at the direction of the State legislature in 1833.

The [Hoyt Papers](#) are now at the Memorial Library in Historic Deerfield, apparently purchased a few years ago and ready to be researched by a historically-minded Montague resident. “Antiquarian Researches: Comprising A History of the Indian Wars” is a very long and detailed history of the colonial wars in New England but the front piece appears to show the falls with canoes crashing over it.

Also, it turns out that Edward Hitchcock may have been Epaphras Hoyt s nephew-so there you have it.

-Jeff Singleton
October 13, 2020

Taken From: [Edward Hitchcock, *Report on the Geology, Mineralogy, Botany and Zoology of Massachusetts* \(Amherst:1833\), pages 99-101.](#)

“Turner's Falls”

There exist in Connecticut River, near the point where the towns of Montague, Gill, and Greenfield, meet. They are by far the most interesting water fall in the State; and I think I may safely say in New England. At least, to my taste, the much broader sheet of water, the higher perpendicular descent, and the equally romantic scenery of the surrounding country, give to this cataract a much higher interest, than is excited by a view of the more celebrated Bellow's Falls on the same river in Walpole New Hampshire : and probably the latter are generally regarded as the most striking object of this kind in New England. Above Turner's Falls the Connecticut for about three miles, pursues a course nearly northwest, through a region scarcely yet disturbed by cultivation; and all this distance it is as placid as a mountain lake, even to the verge of the cataract.

Here an artificial dam has been erected more than a thousand feet long, resting near the center upon two small islands. Over this dam the water leaps more than 30 feet perpendicularly and for half a mile continues descending rapidly and foaming along its course. One hundred rods below the falls, the stream strikes directly against a lofty greenstone ridge, by which it is compelled to change its course towards the south at least a quarter of a circle.

The proper point for viewing Turner's Falls is from road leading to Greenfield on the north shore, perhaps 50 rods below the cataract. Here, from elevated ground, you have directly before you, the principal fall, intersected near the center by two small rocky islands, which are crowned by trees and brushwood. The observer perceives at once that Niagara is before him in miniature. These islands may be reached by a canoe from above the falls in perfect safety. Fifty rods below the cataract, a third most romantic little island lifts its ever green head, an image of peace and security, in the midst of the agitated and foaming waters, swiftly gliding by. The placid aspect of the waters above the fall, calmly emerging from the moderately elevated and wooded hills at a distance, is finely contrasted with its foam and tumult below the cataract.

The country around these falls is but little cultivated. On the opposite side of the river the observer will, indeed, perceive a few dwellings and the head of a canal: But a little beyond, wooded elevations, chiefly covered with evergreens, terminate the landscape; while in every other direction, the scenery is still more wild and unreclaimed from a state of nature.

A sailing excursion from the falls, three miles up the stream, has all the attractions of a passage over a mountain lake. And probably the coves along the shore furnish as good spots for fishing as now exist in the river. The geologist too, will find the vicinity of these falls full of interest - but of this, more hereafter.

Three miles above Turner's Falls, Miller's river empties into the Connecticut; and near its mouth is a fall of considerable height. Here also is another dam across the Connecticut, about 10 feet high. I apprehend these falls have been confounded with Turner's, and hence the latter are sometimes called Miller's Falls. They cannot, however, be said to have as yet any well established name.

For a reason which will be mentioned below, I ventured some eight or ten years ago, in a geological account which I published of the Connecticut valley, to denominate these falls, Turner's Falls; and Gen. Hoyt,] in his History of the Indian Wars, has given them the same designation. I am aware, however, how very difficult it is to make popular and prevalent, a new name for any natural object; although in

the present case, I doubt not, that every man acquainted with the history of this spot, would say that to prefix the name of Capt. Turner to this cataract, is appropriate and just.

About 160 years ago, a party of Philip's Indians, having joined those living in the vicinity, resorted to these falls to take fish. On the 17th of May, Capt. Turner, from Boston, marched from Hatfield, with 150 men, and came by surprise upon the Indian camp the next morning at day light. The Indians being totally unprepared for an attack, fled in every direction: some springing into their canoes without paddles, were precipitated over the falls and dashed in pieces. Three hundred Indians, and but one white man, were killed. Yet the Indians who escaped, being joined by others, fell upon Turner's party as they were returning, and made a dreadful slaughter among them: killing 37, among whom was Capt. Turner. Will not the public do the justice to this brave but unfortunate officer, to send down his name to posterity, associated with that of the spot where he conquered and fell!

During high water, the roar of Turner's falls may be heard from 6 to 10 miles. The magnificence of the cataract is greatly heightened at such a season. In order to visit Turner's Falls, one must turn aside from every great public road; and although but four miles from the village of Greenfield, this circumstance shows why they are so seldom resorted to by travelers. (See Plate IX)."

Take From: [Epaphras Hoyt *Antiquarian Researches: Comprising A History of the Indian Wars*](#) (Greenfield: 1824). Note page 131.

"As the cataract where Turner cut off the Indians has not received an appropriate name, which of Turners Falls is suggested, in commemoration of that officer as well as for convenience. In a geological communication in Silliman's Scientific Journal by Rev E. Hitchcock, the name is already adopted."

Hoyt Family Documents at Historic Deerfield

"A trove of 19th-century documents, consisting of journals, account books, maps, drawings, and notebooks, has recently been purchased at auction and will be available to researchers at the Memorial Libraries, Deerfield, Massachusetts. These manuscripts created by Epaphras Hoyt (1765-1850) and his son Arthur (1811-1899), have been in private hands until now and afford a new perspective on Deerfield's history and the influence the Hoyts exerted on wider events."

<https://www.historic-deerfield.org/blog/2017/9/29/hoyt-family-documents-return-to-deerfield>

Epaphras Hoyt (1765-1850)

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/84053168/epaphras-hoyt>

Source of this bio is not stated

"Major General in the Massachusetts Militia.

First Register of Deeds and High Sheriff in Franklin County.

Declined an appointment, from George Washington, in the U.S. Army. Continental Congress in 1820.

Published a number of books on the wars and military movements, as well as astronomy.

Son of David Hoyt and Silence King; brother of Honorable Elihu Hoyt.

He grew up in Deerfield's legendary Old Indian House, which had survived the 1704 Deerfield raid.

Married Experience Harvey, daughter of Simeon Harvey and Mary Arms, on 4 November, 1792, in Deerfield.

Father of Fannie, Adeline, Isabelle and Arthur Wellesley."

Arthur Wesley Hoyt (1811-1899)

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/84050978/arthur-wellesley-hoyt>

Probably the maker of the 1832 map that shows "Turners Falls" for the first time.

Source of the below bio is not stated.

"Arthur was the only son of Major General Epaphras and Experience Harvey Hoyt. He grew up in Deerfield, along with his 3 sisters: Fanny, Adeline and Isabelle. He trained to be a Civil Engineer. In 1837, Daniel Webster wrote a letter of Introduction, stating him to be well recommended as an Engineer.

On 1 January, 1840, he married Elizabeth Henry, in Deerfield. Arthur and Elizabeth were the parents of Susan, 1840-1843, and Charles Arthur Hoyt 1842-.

In 1857, he built a home for his family facing the Town Common, the most expensive house on the street.

Elizabeth died 25 January, 1863, in Greenfield, Franklin, Massachusetts. After Elizabeth's death, Arthur sold the house in 1863.

On 5 August, 1865, Arthur married as his 2nd wife, Mary Ann Jones, daughter of Abijah and Phebe Cutting Jones.

Arthur died 30 October, 1899 in Deerfield, at age 88 years, 24 days, of old age. At the time of his death, per his death record, he was living in Templeton.

Wife, Mary Ann, died the following year."