

February 26, 2016 7:41PM

Roadside History: Sign marks home site of Dudley Leavitt (1772-1851), publisher of one of nation's first farmer's almanacs

Where it is: It's located on Route 25 in Center Harbor, about 500 feet south of the Meredith-Center Harbor town line.

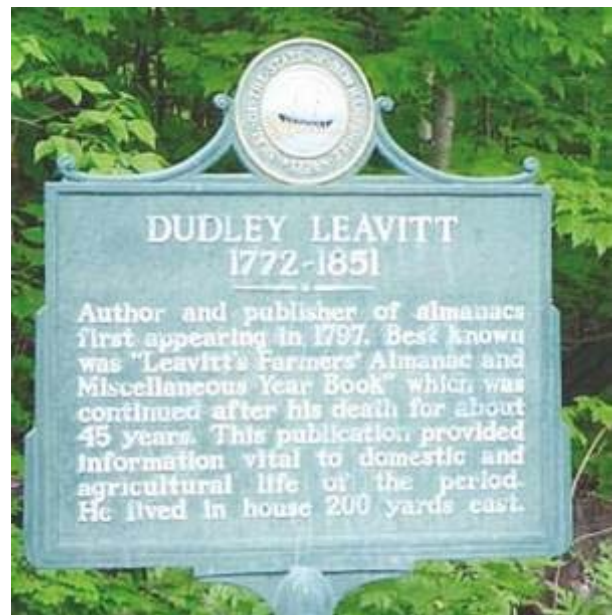
Date it was placed: Historic marker number 7 was placed in 1962.

What the sign says: ?Author and publisher of almanacs first appearing in 1797. Best known was "Leavitt's Farmers' Almanac and Miscellaneous Year Book" which was continued after his death for about 45 years. This publication provided information vital to domestic and agricultural life of the period. He lived in (a) house 200 yards (to the) east."

The back story: A native of Exeter, Leavitt was a graduate of Phillips Exeter Academy and moved to Gilmanton where he edited a newspaper and taught school. He soon moved to Meredith, where, in addition to teaching and farming, he began publishing "Leavitt's Farmer's Almanack," one of the nation's earliest such almanacs.

He first published the almanac in 1797, and it quickly became wildly popular. It continued to be published until 1896, 45 years after Leavitt's death.

Leavitt's first loves were mathematics and astronomy, and he was somewhat of a pure scientist. He routinely contributed scientific papers to societies, most of which focused on astronomy and physics. He was a well-respected writer, and the annual conventions of the American Philosophical Society often heard presentations of various Leavitt findings.



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Hoping to supplement his income, he opened, in about 1820, the Meredith Academick School in which he promised "Instruction in the various grades usually taught in academies. ... No pains will be spared on the part of the instructor to render the acquisition of useful knowledge easy, and pleasant to those young gentlemen and ladies who may attend the school."

Each quarter of enrollment cost \$3 per student. For 50 cents more per quarter, he offered additional instruction in "algebra, navigation, gunnery, the science of projectiles, geometry, trigonometry, astronomy and philosophy."

The school was situated at his Meredith farm less than a mile from Lake Winnepesaukee.

He taught there until he was in his 70s, and it was common for successful men of the day to boast that they "had been educated by Leavitt."

When not teaching, he farmed his 50 acres, raised livestock, edited his almanac, wrote textbooks and scientific papers, or simply immersed himself in reading or study.

Leavitt died at his farm Sept. 20, 1851. At the time of his death, Leavitt had the upcoming issue of his almanac at the press, and another five years' worth of issues already calculated, written and ready for the printer.

The New York Times carried news of his death as the man known for the paper almanacs that hung by cords in family kitchens across New England.

Leavitt was buried in the Leavitt private burial ground on the family farm near his home.

— *N.H. State Library*