

The Origins of “Turners Falls” in David Allen’s Book  
“Early Maps of Montague Massachusetts”, 2004

*Introduction and List of Key Maps by Jeff Singleton, Montague Historical Commission*

This chronology of the origins of the name “Turners Falls” uses the book of “Early Montague Maps” collected and published by David Allen as a primary source, Allen’s collection, which includes maps from the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The pages in the map book are identified for each map listed here. They should be used in conjunction with the map book itself which can be downloaded at:

This is designed to be a list of “primary sources” for the naming of falls and village known as Turners Falls. It is not a narrative of the origins of the name as might appear in a “secondary” account. This list should be used in conjunction with the maps themselves, which can be downloaded.

Primary sources are the basis for most studies produced by professional historians. They are generally defined as sources from the time and place of an event or general phenomenon, although most historians might also consider recollections of participants after the fact to be primary sources.

We should be a bit careful about calling primary sources “facts”, a word generally avoided by historians. Primary sources can certainly have their own biases and produce their own question marks, a reality which good secondary narratives will convey to the reader.. For example simply because a name like “Turners Falls” appears on a map does not necessarily mean that was a name widely used for the falls in the region at the time. But the evidence presented here, along with other sources, provides good evidence we have of when and how the name became attached to the falls and village,

Note: “Early maps” quotes the 1 January 25, 1754 act of the MA General Court as calling Montague a “separate district” and notes that “districts were made towns by Chapter 3, Acts of 1775.” (Allen, 12)

- Jeff Singleton  
October 13, 2020

## **1. Colonial era maps, pp. 6-13**

Allen shows a number of maps and “plans” of Montague before it became an official town. In the early 18<sup>th</sup> century the lower two-thirds of what is now Montague was part of Sunderland, originally called “Swampfield” (1713) and changed to its current name in 1718. The northern portions of Montague which became the villages of Turners Falls and Millers Falls were only added when Montague was incorporated in 1854 according to Allen.

None of these first maps in Allen’s book name the falls (although a 1745 map shows a “Falls” just south of where Turners Falls is today) or show separate villages in what is now Montague.

## **2. 1794 map, pp. 14-15**

Map prepared by surveyor Elisha Root per order of the General Court for a state map published in 1801. This is relatively detailed map, with roads and taverns, does not name the falls but refers to “an island on the grate falls [sic]” where Turners Falls is today. The map indicates another “falls” and possibly a dam on the Connecticut just below where it joins Millers River. The map does not indicate separate villages within Montague,

## **3. 1830 “Town Plan,” pp. 16-17**

Another map mandated by the state but Allen gives no author. This map shows the transportation canal from below the Deerfield River to the current location of the Turner dam, The canal bypasses the falls, but the map does not name the falls, calling it only “Falls.” The map indicates another “Falls” on the Connecticut River just below the junction of the Millers River. There are no village names and only a few buildings shown in what is now Montague Center.

## **4. 1830 Army Corps of Engineers Map, pp. 18-19**

This is the Montague portion of a series of maps showing proposed canal extensions and improvements along the Connecticut River Valley. The series, which Allen says involved extensive surveys and is now located at the National Archives, was designed to show potential transportation improvements “across Massachusetts and all the way to northern Vermont.”

The falls on the map bear the name “Millers Lesser Falls” and the existing transportation canal around them – constructed in the 1790s - is called the “Millers Falls Canal.” It is not clear where the army corps got these names or whether they were common in Montague at the time. Note that Allen has labeled the villages of Turners Falls and Montague City to mark their current location but he says these names do “not appear on the original map.” There are no village names on this map.

## **5. 1832: Montague Segment of Hoyt Franklin Co Map, p 20.**

This is the Montague portion of a Franklin County Map by Arthur Hoyt. Allen says this map is based on the 1830 town plan, which is now identified as being produced by Josiah Gould, but this version identifies “a number of features” not on the 1830 plan.

One of these features is Turners Falls, which is bears the current name for the first time. The map also identifies the “Turners Battle, 1676” just above the dam and an “Upper Locks” just below where the Millers River joins the Connecticut. There are no villages named, however.

This map appears to support the contention of the geologist Edward Hitchcock that he named the falls “Turners Falls” in the 1820s and “Gen.Hoyt, in his History of the Indian Wars, has given them the same designation.” See Edward Hitchcock, *Report on the Geology, Mineralogy, Botany and Zoology of Massachusetts* (Amherst:1833). 101-102. Attached. Gen. Hoyt was the father of Arthur Hoyt and perhaps Hitchcock’s uncle.

#### **6. 1844 Simon Borden Map. p. 21**

This map, also based on the 1830 plan, is part of a state map that has “fewer place names,” according to Allen, but has a “much neater appearance than Hoyt’s county map.” It does not name the falls but names the “Dam at Turners Falls.” It also shows a “Ferry” just above the dam and a “Falls” just below the intersection of the Connecticut and Millers Rivers.

#### **7. 1858 Henry Francis Walling County Map – Montague Segment, pp. 24-25.**

A very detailed map with roads, buildings and even homeowners’ names. The name “Turners Falls” appears on the river, probably the name of the falls not the village which was not yet been built (There are no buildings shown in the TF area).

“Montague Centre” is identified, current Montague City is called “Montague Canal, “and the Montague side of current Millers Falls is called “Grouts Corner.” There is a “Millers Falls” label on the Connecticut river just below the intersection with the Millers River. The lake at Lake Pleasant is called “Great Pond. A railroad curves through the center of town.

#### **8. 1868 Crocker Plan of “Projected City At Turners Falls” pp. 66-67**

This is a detailed plan by William Crocker of the proposed “city at Turners Falls.” William Crocker was an engineer and brother (?) of Alvah Crocker who formed the company that created Turners Falls. The “city” in this map does not bear the name yet but Alvah Crocker’s company which transformed the earlier transportation canal around the falls into a power canal was called “The Turners Falls Company.” Allen notes that “when this map was made, only a few buildings existed and most of the roads were “paper streets.”

This map was reissued in 1873 as the “Plan of the projected City At Turners Falls” pp. 70-71

#### **9. 1871 “Beers Atlas” of Montague 26-27**

Another very detailed map of Montague with roads, homes and other buildings including schools. The falls do not appear to be labeled but the map shows the streets and a few buildings in “Turners Falls” perhaps now a “village.” However Montague City and Montague Center are referred to as Post Office locations. The current village of Millers Falls also appears on the map but not yet Lake Pleasant, whose lake is still called “Great Pond.”

## **10. 1877 Bird's Eye View of Turners Falls**

Here it is – a “Bird's Eye View of Turners Falls” shown from the Greenfield side of the Connecticut River. A good deal more developed than previous maps showing the village's rapid development in the 1870s. However the “top of the hill – currently precincts 3 and 4 - are relatively undeveloped and there are quite a few streets, particularly in the western part of the village, that appear to be hypothetical