

**HISTORICAL SKETCH OF
THE TOWN OF METHUEN,
FROM ITS SETTLEMENT TO
THE YEAR 1876**

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JOS. S. HOWE

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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE TOWN OF

METHUEN,

FROM 1788

SETTLEMENT TO THE YEAR 1876.

BY JOS. S. HOWE.

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1876.

HISTORICAL SKETCH.

It is not attempted in the following pages to present a complete history of the Town of Methuen. The limited time for preparation of this Sketch only admits a recital of the principal facts. No attempt to write the early history of this town has ever been made, and as the old times recede, and old people drop into their graves, much valuable material is becoming lost forever. The investigation necessary to prepare this paper has shown, that by proper effort many old traditions, and much valuable information, might be gathered which would be of great interest and value, not only to us, but to those who come after us. At present, however, we must be content with a rapid and imperfect statement of some of the principal facts in our history as a town.

The native inhabitants of the valley of the Merrimack were the Penacook or Pawtucket Indians, of whom the Chief was Passaconaway, always a firm friend of the settlers. These were subdivided into smaller tribes. The Agawams had their home on the coast, from the Merrimack to Cape Ann; the Wamesits at the junction of the Concord and Merrimack rivers (Lowell); the Pentuckets at the mouth of "Little river," in Haverhill; but no evidence appears showing that any particular Indian tribe had its home in Methuen. It is certain, however, that Bodwell's falls (at the Lawrence dam,) and the shores of the Spicket as far as "Spicket falls," were favorite resorts of the Indians, especially during the fishing season. The rivers in those early days, and for many years afterwards, swarmed with salmon, shad, alewives, bass

and sturgeon. The salmon was the principal fish used as food; the shad and alewives were used by the Indians to manure their corn, and their example was followed by the settlers. It is said on good authority that it was no unusual thing to specify in the articles of agreement between master and apprentice that the apprentice should not be required to eat salmon above six times a week.

Some years before the first settlement of the country, a violent war broke out among the Indians, which resulted in the destruction of a large number. This was succeeded by a pestilence, which carried off many more, so that the number of Indians found by the first settlers in this region was very small. The greater part of Methuen was at first included in the town of Haverhill. That town was first settled in 1640 by about a dozen colonists from Newbury, headed by Mr. Nathaniel Ward. Two years after, the whole territory was purchased of the Indians, Passaquo and Saggahew, who are supposed to have been among the last of the Pentuckets. The original deed—of which the following is a copy—is now in possession of the city of Haverhill:

“KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS, that we, Passaquo and Saggahew, with ye consent of Passaconaway: have sold unto ye inhabitants of Pentucket all ye lands we have in Pentucket; that is eyght myles in length from ye little Rivver in Pentucket Westward: Six myles in length from ye aforesaid Rivver northward: And six myles in length from ye foresaid Rivver Eastward, with ye Ileand and ye rivver that ye ileand stand in as far in length as ye land lyes by as formerly expressed: that is fourteen myles in length;

And wee ye said Passaquo and Sagga Hew with ye consent of Passaconaway, have sold unto ye said inhabitants all ye right that wee or any of us have in ye said ground and Ileand and Rivver;

And we warrant it against all or any other Indians whatsoever

unto ye said Inhabitants of Pentucket, and to their heirs and assigns forever. Dated ye fifteenth day of november Ann Döm 1642.

Witness our hands and scales to this bargayne of sale ye day and year above written (in ye presents of us) we ye said Passaquo & Sagga Hew have received in hand, for & in consideration of ye same three pounds & ten shillings.

JOHN WARD,

ROBERT CLEMENTS,

TRISTRAM COFFIN,

HUGH SHERRATT,

WILLIAM WHITE,

ye sign of ()

THOMAS DAVIS.

PASSAQUO YE MARKE OF
(A bow and arrow)
PASSAQUO. [SEAL]

SAGGA HEW YE MARKE OF
(A bow and arrow)
SAGGA HEW. [SEAL]

It is not easy to see exactly what the Indians intended to convey by this deed, nor does it appear to have been clear to the early settlers; for no regular survey was made until 1666, when we find that a committee was appointed by the General Court to "run the bounds of the Town of Haverhill." They began at the meeting-house, which was situated about half a mile east of Little river, and ran due west eight miles and "reared a heap of stones" (which point must have been a mile or two west of Salem village). Then they ran from that heap of stones due south until they touched the Merrimack (somewhere near the island east of the Bartlett farm), and north until they struck the northern line of the town.

This western boundary of the town remained unchanged until Methuen was set off sixty years afterwards. As finally determined the shape of the town of Haverhill was triangular. Starting from Holt's Rock ("Rocks Village,") the line ran due northwest until it met the north and south line from Merrimack River, as mentioned above.

The strip of land, perhaps a mile and a half in width, between Haverhill Line and "Drawcut" line seems to have been granted by the General Court to individuals. An old plan in

the County records indicates that Major Denison, who had a grant of 600 acres from the General Court in 1660, owned more than a thousand acres on the river, above the Haverhill line, including what is now the Bartlett farm and lands south and west. West of that was Col. Higginson's farm of over three hundred acres. A little north of these was Marshall Michelson's tract of three hundred acres. Printer Green had three hundred acres lying on each side of the brook which runs from "White's pond," then called "North pond."

Thus it will be seen that the title to a great portion of the land in Methuen came directly from the aboriginal owners. It is said that the uplands at that time were mostly covered by a heavy growth of timber, except an occasional spot burned over by fires set by the Indians. The meadows were, many of them, cleared and covered with a tall and dense growth of grass. The Indians were accustomed to burn the grass in the fall, that they might more easily capture the deer resorting to them to feed on the young grass in the spring. These meadows appear to have been much sought after by the early settlers, who obtained from them, the principal subsistence for their cattle. They cut and stacked the hay in the summer and in the winter drew it home on sleds. An early writer says of Haverhill: "The people are wholly bent to improve their labor in tilling the earth and keeping of cattle whose yearly increase encourages them to spend their days in those remote parts. The constant penetrating further into this Wilderness hath caused the wild and uncouth wood to be filled with frequented ways, and the large rivers to be overlaid with Bridges passable both for horse and foot; this town is of large extent, there being an overweaning desire in most men after meadow land," &c. The records of the town of Haverhill show that no one was admitted to the rights and privileges of the Colony unless first voted in by the town.

The lands were divided among the inhabitants in accordance with a vote "That he who had £200 should have 20 acres for his house lot, and every one under that sum to have acres proportioned for his house lot, together with meadow and common and planting ground proportionally."

Lot-layers were chosen by the town to divide the land among the inhabitants as it was cleared up or became accessible. From this mode of division it happened that one man would own a large number of small lots scattered over the whole town. It is now very difficult to exactly locate the lots as they are recorded in the Haverhill records, because they were usually bounded only by marked trees. These descriptions show that some of our local names were of very ancient date. In 1673, thirty-two acres of land were laid off to John Clements, bounded by "Sowes brook." In 1678, "eleven score acres of upland" were laid off to James Davis, Sen., bounded on the west by Spicket river, Spicket falls being the southwest bound. In 1683, we find the record of a similar lot lying on the southerly side, running to "Bloody brook" on the east, and taken up by James Davis, Jr. These lots included the land now occupied by the east part of Methuen village.

In 1658, five acres of meadow were laid off in "Strongwater" near a "little pond." In 1666, a parcel of meadow was laid out to Matthias Button, on the south side of "Spicket hill." In 1659, there was a division of the land west of the Spicket river, with a provision that "if more than two acres meadow be found on any one lot it shall remain to the town." In the same year we find a record of the laying off three acres of land in "Mistake meadow" in the west part of Haverhill, whence we conclude the name originated in somebody's blunder, and by some mistake has become "Mystic." The distribution of common lands was continued from time to time, until