

**THE EARLY GRANTS OF  
LAND IN THE  
WILDERNESSE  
NORTH OF MERRIMACK**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649265398

The Early Grants of Land in the Wilderness North of Merrimack by Geo. A. Gordon

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**GEO. A. GORDON**

**THE EARLY GRANTS OF  
LAND IN THE  
WILDERNESSE  
NORTH OF MERRIMACK**



THE  
EARLY GRANTS OF LAND  
IN THE  
Wilderness North of Merrimack

By GEO A GORDON

---

READ AT LOWELL BEFORE THE  
Old Residents' Historical Association

AUGUST 2 1892

---

*The pyramids themselves, hoary with age, have forgotten the names of  
their founders—THOMAS FULLER*

---

LOWELL MASS  
PRESS OF THE MORNING MAIL  
1892

*III. "The Early Grants of Land in the Wilderness North of the Merrimack," Covering substantially the River Lots from the Brook next above Tyng's Island to the Methuen Line, read Aug. 2, 1892, by George A. Gordon.*

---

It is a subject of regret that my theme has not a larger interest to the hearer. To gentlemen, like yourselves, whose youth was passed elsewhere, the early proprietorship of the shore of this now beautiful river, when the Indians on land and the fish in the water had about an equally adequate idea of its capabilities, is not an engrossing subject. I will try to remember Charles Lamb's advice that there are times when it is commendable in a man to refrain even from good words, and to hold his peace.

Doubtless, it is a cause of wonder that any one can find in such unimportant and forgotten items occasion for an exhibition of antiquarianism. Yet, like all obscurities, near or remote, its pursuit arouses the zest of a pleasure which palls only on attainment. To your Martin Luther and your Country Clubs the primeval name or occupancy of the gem of an island, where they enjoy their exhilarating sports, is a matter of small concern. That the dam at Pawtucket Falls ruined a brawling cascade above the island, as did, later, the dam at Lawrence the better known "Hunt's Falls," may be an accepted fact, sometimes remembered; but the swelling flood of the lordly Merrimack of to-day, beating its ample volume on

either shore, fails to suggest the modest stream which, for a large part of the year, was confined to a narrow channel in colonial times. Only at spring freshets, and after copious rains at other seasons, was the river then worthy of its present character.

We do not always remember, in our exuberant patriotic pride in our native land, that the earliest organization of its settlers was simply that of a business, trading corporation, whose patent acknowledged sovereignty in and fealty to the crown of Great Britain; that the terms "planter" and "plantations," refer to conditional issuing from that patent. The "governor" was the head, as is to-day the president of a corporation. The "assistants" were the "directors"; and the "stockholders'" meeting formed the "general court." By almost imperceptible, hesitating steps, designed to secure stability of police regulations, the planters and their associates, the settlers and their servants, developed, a system of popular government the freest possible, the least aggressive and of the extremest parsimony of expense. They came as Englishmen, relying upon their distant home for defence and protection if exterior conflicts should arise; but shaping their local prudential affairs after the familiar practice, for generations, in the parishes of England. Unlearned and ignorant, like the then rural population of the various shires of England, from whence they had come, of events transpiring in the world about them, they had a sublime confidence in their estimate of their relations towards their Maker. Actuated by the most generous and most benevolent of feeling towards the savage, whom they found in occupancy of the land whereon they had settled, they were disposed to advance him, at once if only he would, from his wild condition to that of a saint in glory. If he would not he must give way. He might share

with them, in perfect equality, in church fellowship and in every inheritance; but, if he declined, he was not to be tolerated.

In many respects the frontier settler was favorably situated. There was much game in the woods, the fish were abundant in the streams, the virgin soil produced generous crops of breadstuffs and culinary vegetables, and the diligent fingers of their wives and daughters clothed all. John Varnum early had a mill at the foot of the Pawtucket Falls, where their grains were readily turned into meal, malt and flour. John Eliot, the apostle, had a corn mill on the Concord, below the Massac Falls, where are now Stott's Mills. Jerathmeel Bowers had a still for strong waters, in Chelmsford, on Black Brook. Every household made their own beer.

The need of the early settlers, planters and servants alike, in public and in private affairs, was ready money. Of that commodity very little was in circulation in New England. A brass farthing, or even a bullet, had a purchasing power beyond the dollar of to-day. Rates, as taxes were then termed, for the support of the ministry, and provision rates for ordinary public expenses, were laid as occasion demanded. These were paid in kind; that is, in the products of their husbandry (for all were farmers), and termed "country pay." As the treasury of the company got low and empty, in the interval of these rates, sums were "advanced," as borrowing and loaning was termed, by those possessing means, and these advances were liquidated by liberal grants of acres in "the wilderness," that is, the illimitable forest outside the plantations. The territory of the plantations, of a defined extent and location, was held to be at the disposal of the inhabitants. A notable example of this is furnished in the case of Billerica, set off from Cambridge,



when every freeholder in the parent town signed the deed of conveyance. The soil, under English law, of these new territories was the domain of the sovereign. The charter, establishing the Bay Colony as successor to the company of adventurers, granted jurisdiction, with some restrictions, over a strip of territory in that part of New England, lying between three miles to the north of the Merrimack and three miles to the south of the Charles, and reaching east and west from ocean to ocean. This charter bore the signature of King Charles I. Under this authority liberal grants of land were made for distinguished public service, to civil officials and military officers; after King Philip's war, to soldiers and needy towns. Often the cautious phrase is used, "so far as this Court hath authority."

A considerable portion of Lowell, skirting the northern shore of the Merrimack, was thus granted. The boulevard, reaching from two little brooks above Pawtucket, or near the inlet to the Water Works' gallery, to opposite Tyng's Island, was granted, three and a quarter miles on the river front, and roughly estimated at a thousand acres, to Captain Oliver, Lieutenant Johnson and Ensign Webb, of the Boston A. & H. A. Six hundred acres next above was granted to Richard Dummer. Beyond the military grant and stretching to the pond, was a grant to the town of Billerica. From the Falls to Beaver Brook was reserved to the Indians that they might have full opportunity to fish. On the east side of Beaver Brook, and extending to the western slope of Dracut Heights, sixteen hundred acres were granted to Richard Russell, treasurer of the Colony, to be accounted as a part of an earlier grant to Sir Richard Saltonstall. Next to this, and up the brook, six hundred acres were granted the town of Billerica. Two hundred and fifty

acres, still farther north, and embracing the present Winter Hill or New Boston, was granted the father of Colonel Tyng, as a farm. Between which and Beaver Brook to the northwest, two hundred acres were granted to Roger Conant. Below this last, and covering present Collinsville, lay a grant of five hundred acres to Capt. John Webb. On the west side of the brook and above the Billerica grant, next Double Brook, lay a gratuity of two hundred and fifty acres to Edmond Batter, a deputy from Salem. Dracut Heights, then undesirable in land riches, was ungranted; but down the river and west of the brook, where to-day local fishermen catch trout, was located a grant of five hundred acres to Samuel Simonds, deputy governor, which, becoming the property of Deane Winthrop, has always been known as the Winthrop farm. The Higginson grant of seven hundred acres was at the extreme limit of Dracut bounds, and ultimately withdrawn across the line.

It must not be forgotten that Dracut reached far into New Hampshire. In that direction Governor Endicot was granted a principality, which passed through the hands of Walter Barefoote, Governor of New Hampshire, to Henry Kimball, who settled it. It has come down in history as the Kimball farm. Mr. Negus, clerk of the writs in Boston, and Mr. Caldicot of Dorchester, were generously remembered. The Negus grant passed to Peter Golding, who settled it and gave his name to Golding's Brook, which would-be purists often corrupt to Golden Brook. Resting upon the north end of Long Pond, and stretching up Gompus Brook, was a tract to George Smith of Ipswich, long known as the Chandler farm.

These several grants covered all the farms of the early settlements of Dracut. No conveyance of title

from the Indian was recognized. Occasionally such were taken, as politic in the interest of harmony. The savage failed to comprehend the intent and import of paper deeds. He seemed to regard them only as memoranda of payments previously made; and he could see no reason why the payment should not be repeated when the coats and blankets and brass kettles, given in consideration of the land, wore out, inasmuch as the land remained.

When, in 1701, the General Court recognized the settlement of Dracut as a town, in the few words which have been regarded, liberally, as an incorporation, a committee of the General Court apportioned a division of its soil to actual inhabitants. This included the farms in the neighborhood of what, a few years ago, was known as the "Yellow Meeting House"; also a tract below the the Winthrop farm, and lots upon Gompus, Meadow and Beaver Brooks. The title to the residue of the territory within her limits ultimately was invested in a board of proprietors, whose doings and acts were engrossed on a vellum bound manuscript, which, I am very glad to say, is still preserved in the office of the town clerk and selectmen. This volume deserves to be printed. At present its contents are accessible only to the patient student, who painfully collates and compares what would be readily apparent in print. The record of the very earliest days in Dracut is lost. That this priceless volume may not meet a similar fate, more than present care must be exercised for its preservation. The only surety lies in printing, which can be accomplished without large cost.

It is the grateful practice to speak of our ancestry, everywhere, who earliest reclaimed the land we inhabit from its primitive wilderness, as earnest, God-fearing men, who took their lives in their hands when, trusting in Providence, they erected their rude habitations and