

**AN HISTORICAL ADDRESS, DELIVERED AT
HAMPTON, NEW-HAMPSHIRE, ON THE
25TH OF DECEMBER, 1838, IN
COMMEMORATION OF THE SETTLEMENT
OF THAT TOWN: TWO HUNDRED YEARS
HAVING ELAPSED SINCE THAT EVENT**

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An historical address, delivered at Hampton, New-Hampshire, on the 25th of December, 1838, in commemoration of the settlement of that town: two hundred years having elapsed since that event by Joseph Dow

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BY

JOSEPH DOW, A. M.

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ADDRESS.

As in the life of every individual, so likewise in the history of every community, there are seasons of more than ordinary interest. There are occasions, where not only individuals, but whole communities, are forcibly reminded of the rapid flight of time, and of the changes effected in a series of years. These changes are not confined to any one class of objects. They may be predicted of almost every thing around us. Many of them are so gradual, that, when viewed in relation to two successive days, they are wholly imperceptible; but they are, on this account, no less real. The countenance of a friend, whom we see every day, appears to undergo but little alteration while he is in health; but let us meet him after an absence of several years, and the change, though no greater than before, is very apparent.

On one of those interesting occasions, when our thoughts are busy with the past, and when they also run forward to scan the events of futurity, we have this day assembled. Two hundred years have passed away since the settlement of our town was commenced, and the church that worships in this house, organized. Our thoughts revert to that period, and, in our imaginations, we hear the forests of Winnicomet, echoing, for the first time, with the sounds of civilized life. In the character and the fortunes of the little band that then came hither, we feel a deep interest, for they were our ancestors.

My object in the following remarks, will be, to give a brief account of the settlement of the town; to notice some of the more important transactions of the people, in the infancy of the settlement; to exhibit, however imperfectly, their trials, dangers,

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and sufferings; and then to trace, in a cursory manner, the history of the first church, through a period of two centuries.

The first permanent settlement in New-England was made near the close of the year 1620.

On the 10th day of August, 1622, a grant was made, by the Council of Plymouth, to Sir Ferdinando Gorges, and Captain John Mason, jointly, of all the land lying between the rivers Merrimack and Sagadahock, now the Androscoggin,—extending back to the great lakes and the river of Canada. This tract was called Laconia, and it was the first grant in which the territory of Hampton was included.

The next year a settlement was commenced near the mouth of the Piscataqua, and another further up the river, at the place which subsequently received the name of Dover.

The principal object in the formation of these settlements, both of which were commenced under the patronage of Gorges, Mason, and several English merchants, styled the "Company of Laconia," was to carry on the fishing business, which, it was thought, would prove very lucrative.

May 17, 1629, a Deed is said to have been given by certain Indian chiefs, assembled at Swamscot falls, now Exeter, to Rev. John Wheelwright and others, conveying to them, for what was deemed an equivalent, all the land along the coast, between the Merrimack and the Piscataqua rivers, and extending back to a considerable distance into the country. In this tract our own territory was evidently embraced.

Recently, however, the authenticity of this Deed has been denied, though it is admitted that Wheelwright, several years afterwards, purchased of the Indians all the land lying within a considerable distance of Swamscot falls. A similar course was probably pursued by those who formed the first settlement in this place.

On the 7th day of November, 1629, the Council of Plymouth made a new grant to Captain Mason, of a tract of land "from the middle of Piscataqua river, and up the same to the farthest head thereof, and from thence north-westward, until sixty miles from the mouth of the harbor were finished; also

' through Merrimack river, to the farthest head thereof, and so ' forward up into the land westward, until sixty miles were finished; and from thence to cross over land to the end of the ' sixty miles as counted from Piscataqua river; together with all ' islands within five leagues of the coast." This tract was called New-Hampshire, and it included the whole of Whelewright's purchase, if such a purchase was ever made, and a part of the land previously granted to Massachusetts, as by the charter of that colony its territory extended three miles north of the Merrimack.

By other arrangements, made in 1630 and 1631, the settlements on the Piscataqua were divided into two parts, called the upper and the lower plantations. Captain Thomas Wigen was appointed agent for the former, and Captain Walter Neal for the latter, which extended as far south as the stream called Little river, in the eastern part of North-Hampton.

In 1633 these two agents united in surveying their respective patents, and in laying out the towns of Portsmouth, Northam, afterwards called Dover—and Hampton; though no settlement had at that time been made at the place last mentioned.

Dr. Belknap says, that this survey was made by order of the company of Laconia, and that these towns, together with Exeter, were named by that company. Hampton was, however, incorporated by its present name at the request of the first pastor of the church established here. Whether he chose the name in conformity to the wishes of the company of Laconia, I cannot tell.

I have been thus particular in noticing the different grants that were made of the same territory, as they gave rise to much subsequent litigation and expense, by which this town, as well as others, was exceedingly harassed.

In 1636 the General Court of Massachusetts authorized two persons, Mr. Dummer and Mr. Spencer, to erect a house at Hampton, which was then called by its Indian name, Winnicomet. A house was accordingly built by Nicholas Easton, under the direction of the two persons just mentioned, and at the expense of the Colony of Massachusetts. This house was called the

Bound House, although, as Dr. Belknap observes, it was intended as a mark of possession rather than of limit.

There is no evidence that a settlement was actually made here, till two years afterwards. For what purpose, then, was the Bound House erected?

The General Court had learned, that there were in this vicinity extensive salt-marshes. These must, at that time, have been very valuable, as the upland had not been brought to such a state of cultivation as to afford a sufficient quantity of hay to winter the stock which might be kept through the summer. The court wished to secure these marshes, and, by causing a house to be erected near them, at the expense of the Colony, they virtually claimed jurisdiction over them. It was, perhaps, for the purpose of asserting such a jurisdiction, that they adopted this measure.

On what grounds could the General Court claim jurisdiction here? The chartered limits of Massachusetts extended only three miles north of the Merrimack; but the Bound House was probably much farther from that river.

That they did set up such a claim, is evident from the fact that they soon after made a formal grant of the territory to the company that actually formed a settlement here.

By a plain, natural construction of the meaning of their charter, this place was, undoubtedly, beyond their limits, while it was evidently included in the grant made to Captain Mason. The charters, however, that were given by the Council of Plymouth, and also those granted by the Crown, were often worded with too little care. Sometimes, unquestionably, this arose from a want of sufficient geographical information concerning the portions of country granted, and, at other times, from sheer carelessness.

In this case, the grant to Massachusetts was of land reaching to "three miles north of the Merrimack river, and of every part of it." Now, though that river is more than three miles south of this place, yet, if we trace it up to its source, we shall find, that it rises much farther to the north than we are, and Massachusetts claimed the land to our east and west line, pass-

ing through a point three miles north of the most northerly part of the river.

Such a construction of their charter would give the people of that Colony all the land granted to Mason, and a large part of Maine, which had been granted to Gorges; thus rendering the claims of these two gentlemen null and void, as the grants to them were made after that to Massachusetts.

The agent of Mason's estate made some objections to the claims and the proceedings of Massachusetts, yet no legal method was taken to controvert this extension of their claim; and, as the historian of New-Hampshire very justly observes, "the way was prepared for one still greater, which many circumstances concurred to establish."

In 1638 a petition was presented to the General Court of Massachusetts, by a number of people, chiefly from Norfolk in England, praying for permission to settle at Winnicomet. On the 7th of October their request was granted. Few privileges, however, were allowed besides that of forming a settlement. In the language of the early records of our town, "the power of managing the affairs thereof was not then yielded to them, but committed by the court to" three gentlemen, not belonging to the settlement, "so as nothing might be done without the allowance of them, or two of them." *

It was not till the 7th of June, 1639, that the plantation was allowed to be a town, and to choose a constable and other officers, and, as our records state, "to make orders for the well ordering of the town, and to send a deputy to the court." Even then the power of laying out land was not granted to the town, but was left to the three gentlemen to whom I have already alluded.

At that time three men belonging to the town, viz. Christopher Hussey, William Palmer, and Richard Swaine, were appointed by the General Court, as commissioners, or justices, to have jurisdiction over all causes of twenty shillings, or under.

* John Winthrop, Jr., and Mr. Rawson—probably Edward Rawson—were two of this committee. The name of the other is gone from the records of the town.

On the 4th day of September, in the same year, at the request of Rev. Stephen Bachelor, the name of the town was changed from Winnicomet to Hampton, and about the same time, through the influence of their deputy, the right of disposing of the land, and laying it out, was vested in the town.

The number of the original settlers was fifty-six. Rev. Dr. Appleton, in his dedication sermon, preached in 1797, says, "of the names of the first settlers of Hampton, only sixteen are transmitted to us; and but four of these names continue in the place."* The same four names are still found among us, though one of them will probably soon become extinct, as it is now borne by only two individuals, both of them aged females.

The names of the sixteen persons referred to by Dr. Appleton are given in the first volume of Belknap's History of New-Hampshire. In that list the name of only one female is found, and it is probable that most of the other settlers were members of the families of these sixteen.

Though the number of settlers was at first only fifty-six, yet large additions were soon made. At the time when the settlement became a town, the number of inhabitants had very much increased. Indeed, a writer who lived and wrote about that time, says that in 1639 there were about sixty families here.† It has been supposed that this writer stated the number larger than it really was. There are, however, reasons for believing that his statement is not far from the truth. In the record of the proceedings at a town meeting, early in the following year, more than sixty individuals are mentioned; and it is probable, from the great diversity of their names, that they belonged to nearly as many different families.

The historian of New-Hampshire says, that the people here began the settlement by laying out the township into one hundred and forty-seven shares. Others, relying upon him as authority, have repeated the statement. Our records, however, furnish an abundance of evidence that it is incorrect; and had Dr. Belknap, in this instance, exercised his usual caution, he would not have been led into such an error. The transaction which

* See Appendix, A.

† See Appendix, B.