

**TOPOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL
SKETCHES OF THE TOWN OF
NORTHBOROUGH, WITH THE EARLY
HISTORY OF MARLBOROUGH, IN THE
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649332526

Topographical and Historical Sketches of the Town of Northborough, with the Early History of Marlborough, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts by Joseph Allen

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Cover @ 2017

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JOSEPH ALLEN

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OF THE
TOWN OF NORTHBOROUGH,
WITH THE
EARLY HISTORY OF
NARBOROUGH,
IN THE
Commonwealth of Massachusetts,
FURNISHED FOR THE
WORCESTER MAGAZINE.

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WORCESTER COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY.

WORCESTER:
PUBLISHED BY W. LINCOLN & C. C. BALDWIN.
CHARLES GRIFFIN.....PRINTER.
1826.

HISTORY OF NORTHBOROUGH.

NORTHBOROUGH, though one of the youngest and smallest incorporated towns in the County of Worcester, was, for nearly 50 years, prior to the date of its incorporation, a part of Westborough; first as part of an undivided whole, and then as a separate precinct or parish. This carries us back to the year 1717, before which time, Westborough itself, including Northborough, belonged to the large and ancient town of Marlborough. Northborough then, as being included in Marlborough, may lay claim to considerable antiquity. Marlborough was incorporated in 1660, only about 30 years after the commencement of the Massachusetts Colony. The stream of emigration may easily be traced back from this, which was for many years a frontier settlement, bordering upon the unexplored wilderness, to the fountain head. The settlement in Marlborough was commenced four years before the date of its incorporation, by emigrants from Sudbury, which was older by about 20 years than Marlborough, having been incorporated in 1638. The next step carries us back to Concord, which was purchased of the natives and incorporated in 1635.*

The next step brings us to Watertown, where a settlement was made in 1630, the same year that Boston began to be built. It was in this year that a large number of emigrants arrived from England, which served greatly to enlarge and strengthen the Colony, then in its infancy. The oldest town in the Massachusetts Colony is Salem, where a settlement was commenced in 1629, eight years after the landing of our fathers at Plymouth.

* 1. Mass. Hist. Col. Vol. I.

Thus we see that within the short space of 30 years from the first planting of this Colony, the wilderness had been explored, and a permanent settlement effected, by our enterprising forefathers, in the ancient town of Marlborough, which then included Westborough, Southborough, and Northborough, now within the limits of Worcester County.

It will not therefore be improper to prefix to the history of this town some account of the first settlement and early history of the Plantation at Marlborough.

The following petition was presented to the General Court in May, 1656.

"To the Hon. Governor, Dep. Governor, Magistrates and Deputies of the General Court now assembled in Boston."

"The humble petition of several of the Inhabitants of Sudbury, whose names are hereunder written, humbly sheweth; that whereas your petitioners have lived divers years in Sudbury, and God hath bene pleased to increasē our children, which are now divers of them grown to man's estate, and wee, many of us, grown into years, so as that wee should bee glad to see them settled before the Lord take us away from hence, as also God having given us some considerable quantity of cattle, so that wee are so streightened that wee cannot so comfortably subsist as could bee desired; and some of us having taken some pains to view the country; wee have found a place which lyeth westward, about eight miles from Sudbury, which wee conceive might bee comfortable for our subsistence:

"It is therefore the humble request of your Petitioners to this Hon'd Court, that you would bee pleased to grant unto us () eight miles square, or so much land as may containe to eight miles square, for to make a plantation.

"If it shall please this Hon'd Court to grant our petition, it is farther than the request of your petitioners to this Hon'd Court, that you will bee pleased to appoint Mr. Thomas Danforth or Lieuten^{al} Fisher to lay out the bounds of the Plantation; and wee shall satisfy those whom this Hon'd Court shall please to employ in it. So apprehending this weighty occasion, wee shall no farther trouble this Hon'd Court, but shall ever pray for your happiness."

Edmond Rice, Thomas King, William Ward,
John How,* John Bent, Sen'r. John Maynard,

* According to a tradition handed down in the family, the first English person that came to reside in Marlborough, was John How, son of a How, of Watertown, supposed to be John How, Esq. who came from Warwickshire, in

John Woods, Edward Rice, John Ruddocke,
Richard Newton, Peter Bent, Henry Rice,
Thomas Goodenow.

"That this is a true copy of the original petition presented to the General Court, May, 1666, left on file and thereto compared, is Attested, per EDWARD RAWSON, Sec^{ry}."

To this petition the following answer was made.

At a General Court held in Boston, May 14, 1756.

"In answer to the petition of the aforesaid inhabitants of Sudbury, the Court judgeth it meete to grant them a proportion of land of six miles, or otherwise, in some convenient form equivalent thereunto, at the discretion of the committee in the place desired, provided it hinder no former grant, that there bee a Towne settled with twenty or more families within three years, so as an able ministry may bee there maintained. And it is ordered that Mr. Edward Jackson, Capt. Eleazer Lusher, Ephraim Child, with Mr. Thomas Danforth, or Liesten^{al} Fisher, shall bee, and hereby are appointed as a committee to lay out the bounds thereof, and make return to the next Court of Election, or else the grant to bee void.

"This is a true copy taken out of the Court's Books of Records, as Attests EDWARD RAWSON, Sec^{ry}."

England, and who, as appears from a record in the possession of Mr. Adam How, of Sudbury, also a descendant of John, was himself the son of John How, of Hodinhull, and connected with the family of Lord Charles How, Earl of Lancaster, in the reign of Charles I.

Mr. How came from Watertown to Marlborough, built a cabin a little to the east of the Indian Planting field, where his descendants lived for many generations. By his prudence and kindness, he gained the good will and confidence of his savage neighbors, who accordingly made him the umpire in all their differences.

The following is related as one of the verdicts of this second Solomon. Two Indians, whose corn fields were contiguous, disputed about the possession of a pumpkin, which grew on a vine, that had transgressed the limits of the field in which it was planted. The vine was planted in one field; the pumpkin grew in the other. The dispute grew warm, and might have led to serious consequences, had it not occurred to them to refer the matter in debate to the arbitration of the white man, their neighbor. Mr. How is accordingly sent for, who after having given a patient hearing to both parties, directs them to bring him a knife, with which he divides the pumpkin into two equal parts, giving half to each. Both parties extol the equity of the judge, and readily acquiesce in the decision, pleased, no doubt, quite as much with the manner in which the thing was done, as in admiration of the justice of the deed.

The descendants of John How are very numerous in Marlborough, and in the towns in the vicinity. There are 26 of the name of How on the list of voters, in Marlborough, for the present year.

Col. Thomas How was a son of the above, who, for many years, was one of the leading men in the town. John How died sometime before 1686, as appears by a deed of his son Josiah to Thomas, of that date. Rev. Perley How, of Surry, N. H. was a descendant of John, and of Col. Thomas How.

The Plantation was accordingly soon commenced in the neighborhood of Ockoocangansett, (the Indian name of the hill back of the old Meeting House in Marlborough,) and thence extending to Whipsuppenicke, (a hill about a mile southeasterly of the former,) and the neighboring parts. By this name, Whipsuppenicke, or Whipsufferadge, as it was sometimes written, the English Plantation of Marlborough was known, till its incorporation, in 1660.

Of the Indian Plantation at Marlborough, called, from the hill abovenamed, Ockoocangansett, some account will be given hereafter.

A plan of the English plantation was made in May, 1667, by Samuel Andrews, surveyor, which was approved by the Deputies, 17th Mo. 1667.

WM. TORREY, Clerk.

Consented to by the Magistrates. EDWARD RAWSON, Sec'y.

This plan was made on parchment on a scale of two inches to a mile, and is now in the hands of Mr. Silas Gates of Marlborough.

The plantation contained by admeasurement 29,419 acres, which, with the 6000 acres reserved for the Indians, of which we shall presently speak, amounted to 35,419 acres. The Indian planting field, on Ockoocangansett, the hill back of where the old meeting house stood, was included within the bounds of the English plantation, and formed a square containing about two hundred acres. From the northwestern angle of this field the boundary line between the Indian plantation on the east, and the English plantation on the west, extends three miles north, seven degrees west, to a point a little beyond the river Assabett*. From this point the boundary line runs seven miles west, twenty five degrees south, (cutting off what is now the northwest angle of Northborough, and which forms what are called the *New Grants*.) Thence five miles south-southeast, to the south west extremity of the plantation; thence two miles and three-fourths of a mile east, nine degrees north, leading into Cedar swamp; thence southeast, two hundred and fifty six rods on Sudbury River; thence two miles and three quarters, due east; thence two miles and one hundred and twenty rods northeast, thirteen degrees north; thence three

* This name is written and spoken variously by different persons. In the report of the Canal Commissioners presented at the recent session of the Legislature of this State, it is written *Elsabeth*, and is supposed to be a corruption of *Elisabeth*. By some aged persons, it is called *Elsabeth*; in Whitney's Hist. *Assabet*. In the earliest records of Marlborough, however, it is almost uniformly written with a final *h*, *Assabeth* or *Assabeth*. If either of the two last letters are omitted, it should probably be the *l*. In which case the name would be *Assabeth*.

hundred and forty eight rods north, seventeen degrees east; thence one mile and three fourths of a mile due north, which reaches to the Indian line; then three miles, due west, on this line, which completes the boundaries of the English plantation.

It would seem, from the above account, that the proprietors exceeded the limits of their grant by more than 6000 acres. We are not to conclude, however, that they acted fraudulently in this business; since it appears that the draft of the plantation was presented to the General Court for their acceptance, and approved by the Deputies and Magistrates.

The form of the plantation was evidently regulated by a regard to the surface and soil. Thus the boundary lines on the north and west included all the meadows on the Assabeth, west of the Indian plantation, and the extensive intervale, including several large meadows and cedar swamps, which runs through nearly the whole extent of Northborough and Westborough. The boundaries on the south and east were also fixed with the same sagacity and foresight.

It is said that the meadows, at the first settlement of our country, produced much larger crops of grass, of a much better quality, than at the present day. This circumstance, together with the difficulty of subduing the uplands, will account for the eagerness manifested by the first settlers to possess a good supply of meadow grounds.*

The first meeting of the proprietors of the English plantation, was holden 25th of the VIIth month (September) 1656.†

In 1657, the following eight names are found among the proprietors, in addition to the thirteen original petitioners above mentioned, making up the number of twenty one.

* It appears from the early records of Marlborough, that for many years after its incorporation, the town was greatly infested by wolves and rattlesnakes.

In a single year, (1683) the town paid a bounty for no fewer than *twenty three* wolves. In 1680, the following record was made. "Voted, to raise thirteen men *to go out to kill rattlesnakes*, eight to Cold Harbour-ward, and so to the other place they call Boston, (now the northwestern corner of Westborough) and five to Stoney Brook-ward, to the places thereabout. John Brigham to call out seven with him to the first, and Joseph Newton four with him, to the latter, and they were to have two shillings apiece per day, paid out of a town rate."

† "Sept. 25th. 1656. Upon amitinge of the petitioners apoynted to take sum course to lay out the plantation granted to several inhabitants of Sudbury, it was ordered that all that doe take up lottes in that plantation shall pay all publique charges that shall arise upon that plantation, according to their house lottes and to be resident there in two years or set in a man that the town shall approve one, or else too loose their lotts; but if God shall take away any man by death, he have liberty to give his lott to whom he will."

William Kerly,	Samuel Rice,	Peter King,
John Rediat,	John Johnson,	Christopher Banister.
Solomon Johnson,	Thomas Rice,	

"At a meeting of the proprietors of this plantation the 26th of Xber, (December) 1659.

"It is ordered that all such as lay clayme to any interest in this new plantation at Whipsufferadge, (by the Indians called Whipsuppenicke) are to perfect their house lots by the 25th of March next insueing, or else to loose all their interest in the aforesaid plantation."

Agreeably to this order, thirty eight house lots, including one for a minister, and one for a smith, were set off, and granted to the proprietors, the 26th of Nov. 1660.

Besides the persons already mentioned, the following had house lots assigned to them, at this date.

Joseph Rice,	Richard Ward,	John Barret,
John How, Jr.	Benjamin Rice,	Jos. Holmes,
Henry Kerley,	John Bellows,	Samuel How,
Richard Barns,	Abraham How,	Henry Axtell,
Andrew Belcher,	Tho. Goodenow, Jr.	John Newton.
Obediah Ward,	John Rutter,	

These thirty eight house lots, amounting in all to 992½ acres consisted of some of the best and most commodious tracts of land in Marlborough. They contained from fifty to fifteen acres each, according to the interest of the several proprietors in the plantation. The principal part of the land, which was not taken up for house lots, with the exception of Chauncey, (now Westborough and Northborough,) was left common (called *Cow Commons*) to be disposed of by subsequent grants.

The following boundaries were assigned to the *Cow Commons* in 1662.

"From John Alcocks line (now known by the name of *the Farm*) to Stoney Brook; thence up the brook to Crane Meadow, and so along to Stirrup Meadow Brook, and to be extended as the Brooke runs to Assibathe River, and down the said river till it comes to the Indian line. This is, and shall remain a perpetual Cow Common for the use of this town, never to be altered without the consent of all the inhabitants and proprietors thereof at a full meeting; excepting four score acres of upland this town hath reserved within the aforesaid tract of land to accommodate some such desirable persons withall as need may require, opportunity present, and the town accept."