

# Did Your Ancestor Really Remove to New Hampshire in the 1700s?

By Sherry L. Gould

The early settlers of New Hampshire differed from their neighbors in Massachusetts primarily in their intentions for life in the new land. While the Pilgrims first settled Massachusetts in 1620 (the Puritans arrived roughly a decade later), New Hampshire's first English subjects were loyal to the Church of England. Rather than religious freedom, they were interested in fishing, trading, and other pursuits aimed at returning a profit. A century of competing interests in lands granted by the neighboring provinces can be reviewed in the numerous histories of the state. This article focuses on the border dispute between New Hampshire and Massachusetts that was settled in 1741. As part of the settlement, King George II named Benning Wentworth governor at Portsmouth, over a province further separated from the Bay Colony. The settlement also changed the border, which has created lasting confusion for family historians regarding the location of their ancestors in northern Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire during that time frame.

The original grant of New Hampshire to John Mason, Esquire, of London, on November 7, 1629 contained the first mention of the Merrimack River as the southern boundary of the state.<sup>1</sup> The area of the grant north of the river proceeded up New Hampshire's short coast to the Maine border and sixty miles up the Salmon Falls River (as it is known today), then on an arched course back to the southern border near the area of Dunstable, Massachusetts. The border was recorded in the early records of the Massachusetts Bay Company as three miles north of the outlet of the Merrimack River where it met the Atlantic on the east, to a point where it was mistakenly believed the course of the river ran westerly across the length of the border.<sup>2</sup> The northwesterly course of the river was later discovered, but Massachusetts held to the river as the border.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Bay Colony granted new townships throughout the Merrimack River valley area and other areas west of the Merrimack in what is now New Hampshire. New Hampshire went ahead and issued grants on competing land to her sons.<sup>4</sup> On the eastern border, the original three-mile mark was overshot north of the outlet of the Merrimack, adding land to Salisbury, Massachusetts, at the expense of the area of Hampton Falls, New Hampshire.

On July 16, 1713, after peace with France and the eastern native tribes was achieved by Queen Ann, a committee was chosen to work with contemporaries from Massachusetts "to run ye devideing line between the Provinces According to the Royall Charter Granted to the Massathusetts."<sup>5</sup> In 1726, Lieutenant Governor John Wentworth appealed to the king to establish a boundary line between the two colonies.<sup>6</sup> The two provinces continued to demonstrate that a settlement was not to be reached mutually. After much ado, on June 5, 1734, the Lords of Trade accepted the opinion of New Hampshire's attorney general and the solicitor general and reported that the king should appoint commissioners comprised of representatives from the provinces of New York, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Nova Scotia to settle the line.<sup>7</sup> Upon completion of their work, the commissioners had a doubt in point of law and referred the matter to the king in council.

The lingering dispute was taken up on August 5, 1740. At that time it was determined that "The Northern Boundaries of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay, are and be a similar curve line Pursuing the course of the Merrimack River, at three miles distance, on the north side thereof, beginning at the Atlantic Ocean and ending at a point due north of a place in the plan returned by the said Commissioners, called Pawtucket Falls, and a strait line drawn from thence due west, cross the said river till it meet his Majesty's other Governments."<sup>8</sup>

This decision was given to Governor Belcher who served as governor of both provinces. Much accusation has been made regarding his leanings toward New Hampshire in the form of bribes and such.<sup>9</sup> The subjects of Massachusetts were well known to the Monarch as more rebellious and difficult to rule. New Hampshire's small landmass and sparse population caused her to be quite interdependent on her rebel neighbors to the south. No doubt the New Hampshire subjects' loyalty to the Church of England, and other politics of the mother country, played into the settling of the border in 1741 to what we have today, much in New Hampshire's favor.

Prior to the settlement of this issue, citizens were frequently caught in uncertainty. It was not uncommon for those in

the disputed territories to be taxed by both provinces. At times the other province penalized citizens for refusal of payment when they had paid tax to the province, which they believed they were a part of. Property was taken and, in some instances, townspeople were imprisoned. The settled line cut many border towns apart. Families wound up residing in different states, let alone towns. Settlers had to travel many miles to their meetinghouse, rather than the one close by, which they had helped to build.

One area greatly affected was [Dunstable, Massachusetts](#). The title page of *History of the Old Township of Dunstable: including Nashua, Nashville, Hollis, Hudson, Litchfield, and Merrimac, N.H.; Dunstable and Tyngsborough, Mass.*, by Charles J. Fox (Nashua, 1846) gives part of the picture of what became of Dunstable. A map on page 12 of that volume shows that Dunstable encompassed all of Brookline and Milford; parts of Mason, Wilton, Lyndeborough, Mount Vernon, Amherst, Londonderry, Windham and Pelham, NH; and parts of Townsend, Shirley, Groton, Westford, Chelmsford, Lowell and Dracut, MA. Nottingham had been carved out from the easterly side of the Merrimack River and granted by the Bay Colony to the inhabitants of Dunstable residing in that part of town in 1732.<sup>10</sup> This area fell into New Hampshire when the line was settled in 1741. The province of New Hampshire chartered Nottingham-West in 1746. The addition of "West" was added due to the existing town of Nottingham in the eastern area of the state. Nottingham-West became Hudson in 1830.

In the *History of the town of Hollis, New Hampshire, from its first settlement to the year 1879*, by Samuel T Worchester (Nashua, 1879); one may read all about the ebb and flow of towns such as Monson, (a town which existed for 24 years), Duxbury, Mile Slip, Raby, etc. On a [map of New Hampshire](#) done by Col. Joseph Blanchard in 1761, Nottingham-West is on the east side of the Merrimack River, Dunstable on the west side of the same river, Hollis west of Dunstable on the Massachusetts border, and Monson directly north of Hollis. The same is visible on [Bowles's New Pocket Map](#) of 1780, except Monson is not shown. Jeremy Belknap's "New Map of New Hampshire," 1791, shows Dunstable and Hollis with Litchfield in place, but it does not show Nottingham-West, or Hudson.

The title and explanations pages from *Dunstable (MA) Vital Records to 1850* do not address the issue of early records and the border dispute, except to state, "The early records of the Congregational Church, organized in 1685, now the First Congregational Church of Nashua, New Hampshire, cannot be found." An interesting question for another day is whether vital records are reported in both locations.

[Hampton, New Hampshire](#) is another area that was affected by the moving border. Dow covers the many changes that occurred in the southern regions of the town in *The History of Hampton*.<sup>11</sup> Page 145 of that volume gives the circumstances surrounding the formation of the town of South Hampton incorporated in 1742 with individuals who were originally in the towns of Salisbury and Amesbury, Massachusetts. So an ancestor born in Salisbury, Massachusetts might well die in South Hampton, New Hampshire without ever having moved. Other Massachusetts towns affected were Haverhill, Methuen and Dracut.<sup>12</sup>

In the final analysis, researchers who find ancestors in these border towns of New Hampshire during this time frame should carefully consult vital records on both sides of the border. Land records will also be helpful to see if indeed their ancestors moved or whether instead they were involved in this moving border matter.

1. Albert Stillman Bachellor, *State Papers New Hampshire* vol. XXIX (Concord, NH: Edward N. Pearson, 1896) p. 30
2. Kimball Webster, *History of Hudson* (Manchester, NH: Granite State Publishing, 1913) p. 88
3. Frank B. Sanborn, *New Hampshire an Epitome of Popular Government* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1904) p. 166
4. See James O. Lyford, *History of Concord* vol. 1 (Concord, NH: Rumford Press, 1903) p. 188, for more on the Bow Controversy.
5. Albert Stillman Bachellor, *State Papers New Hampshire* vol. XIX (Manchester, NH: John B. Clarke, 1891) p. 44
6. Frank B. Sanborn, *New Hampshire an Epitome of Popular Government* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1904) p. 167

7. Joseph Dow, *The History of Hampton, NH* (Salem, MA: Salem Press Publishing & Printing, 1893) p. 141
8. Nathaniel Bouton, *Provincial Papers of New Hampshire* vol. VII (Concord, NH: 1875) pp. 221-226
9. Joseph Dow, *The History of Hampton, NH* (Salem, MA: Salem Press Publishing & Printing, 1893) p. 144 and Frank B. Sanborn, *New Hampshire an Epitome of Popular Government* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1904) p. 171
10. Kimball Webster, *History of Hudson* (Manchester, NH: Granite State Publishing, 1913) p. 93
11. Joseph Dow, *The History of Hampton, NH* (Salem, MA: Salem Press Publishing & Printing, 1893) pp. 137-145
12. Frank B. Sanborn, *New Hampshire an Epitome of Popular Government* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. 1904) p. 170