

HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF WOLFEBORO, NH

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(Compiled by Gene Denu, Director/Archivist)

A simplified version of the predominate details of the early development, compiled from information in Parker's and Bowers' Histories, Marshall Ray's Cottonboro notes, State Provincial Papers and various internet sources.

It is noted that history shows many territorial ownership disputes and centuries of boundary disputes continuing, in some areas, to modern times (the ownership of the Portsmouth Shipyard grounds is an example). Inaccuracies of mapping, multiple and overlapping grants, name changes and river shifting were also contributors to confusion. These details are generally omitted in this discussion.

Also omitted is the philosophical discussion of theft, as the Countries of England, France, Spain and others truly had no right to take America away from the Native Americans, driving them off their ancestral lands in the process. .

November 3, 1620. King James I of England granted title to all lands in America between the 40th and 48th latitude to the Plymouth Council, a group of 40 prominent English gentlemen. The land extended from about where Philadelphia now is to the northern tip of New Brunswick, Canada, and the original grant stated sea to sea (as was common in those days). This area was known as New England. See the attached map. Although not listed as one of the 40 granters, Captain John Mason became the Secretary of the Council and was given rights to a share. An odd provision in the Grant was that title shares could only pass to heirs if they had the same last name as the original holder.

August 10, 1622. The Council divided the original huge parcel and gave a Patent to Sir Ferdinando Gorges and Captain John Mason. The area was basically between the Merrimac and Kennebec Rivers, from the sea north to a line roughly passing Moultonboro to a point north of Augusta, Maine. The exact location was never completely established, with the northern border a point of contention. This area was called Province of Maine and settlement began around Portsmouth in 1623. An English group called Company of Laconia planned further settlement in 1629.

November 7, 1629. The Council further divided the 1622 Patent, splitting it into two parcels at the Piscataqua River (NH/ME border). Sir Ferdinando Gorges was given the Maine parcel and Captain John Mason was granted the west portion, which was called New Hampshire (even though it was only about one fourth of the present state). John Mason chose the name in honor of the English town of Hampshire, where he had lived.

1635 - 1746. The Council surrendered its charter to the King in June, 1635. Captain John Mason had wisely had his Grant separately confirmed. He died later that year, having never set foot in America. His Grant passed to infant grandson John Tufton, whose name was changed to John Tufton Mason to comply with the 1620 Grant, then to his brother Robert Tufton Mason. Robert was the first member of the Mason family to come to America. A number of legal disputes occurred for over 100 years. Finally, on July 30, 1746, descendent John Tufton Mason (5 generations from Capt. John Mason), sold the Province of New Hampshire for 1500 pounds to a syndicate of twelve men who thereafter were known as the Proprietors of Mason's Patent, or the Masonian Proprietors. Prominent in negotiating the sale was the King's Agent to the House of Representatives for the Province of NH (a pre-revolution body that met in Portsmouth), John Thomlinson of London. His name will appear later as a landowner, but it appears that he also never set foot in America.

October 5, 1759. The Proprietor's of Mason's Patent met in Portsmouth and, for the purpose of creating a settlement, convey the property which will become Wolfeboro to four people. Mapping and settlement requirements are defined. No cost is involved, but the land may revert to the Proprietors if the requirements are not met.. Ref. Strafford County Registry of Deeds 14/108-115.

October 26, 1759. The four owners admit twenty additional associates. There was apparently a nominal five shilling cost per associate.

November 14, 1759. The group of twenty-four owners met in Portsmouth and voted that the town be named Wolfeborough, in honor of General James Wolfe, who died September 13, 1759, in battle at the Plains of Abraham, Quebec, Canada.

February 19, 1766. The town has been mapped by this time. About three-fourths of the town had been split into 24 parcels of equal value, averaging around 600 acres each. One-fourth of the town was set aside as the "Lord's Quarter", a withheld area reserved for the Lord of the Manor in feudal times. A mill site around the Smith River in the present Wolfeboro Falls area was reserved for the first sawmill. Another large area remained and was split between Daniel Pierce and Paul March. March's parcel was to be subdivided for the purpose of encouraging early settlement and resulted in the "Seven Farms". The twenty-four owners met in Portsmouth and drew lots. The results are shown on the attached chart, which also lists the owners circa 1804, taken from a map created by surveyor Henry Rust, jr. A number of sales, trades and forfeitures had occurred by that time.

November 8 1769. The "Lord's Quarter" was considered still owned by the Masonian Proprietors. This area was divided into 18 lots, about 300 acres each, except Lot 1 which was 450 acres and reserved for a school. The Proprietors met in Portsmouth and drew lots. The lots went to individuals and partnerships. Lot 5 is interesting, as it was drawn by John Tomlinson (the King's Agent noted above) and John Mason (5th generation from Capt. Mason). John Horn was noted as the agent.

Later, in 1800, an additional 5 lots on the north side, which were originally intended to be part of Ossipee, were added to Wolfeboro. These were in the Brown's Ridge area, and were called the Wolfeboro Addition.

After the above divisions were completed, there were a total of 47 mapped lots. The first settlers arrived in 1767 or 1768. Settling proceeded slowly, with counts of 165 residents in 1773, 211 residents in 1775, 447 in 1790, and 941 in 1800..

Attachments: ---- Early Division of Wolfeboro by the Masonian Proprietors (Owner Chart)
---- Brief Notes on the Seven Original Farms in Wolfeboro
---- Copy of C.1804 Plan by Henry Rust, Jr. (Map of Divisions)
---- Reorganization of the Plymouth Company in 1620 (Map of Grant)
---- Map of 1622 and 1629 Patents to Mason and Gorges