

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE TOWN – GRANTS OF FARMS ON THE SOUHEGAN – CHARTER OF OLD DUNSTABLE – SETTLEMENT OF THE STATE LINE – TRACTS OF LAND OUT OF WHICH MILFORD WAS FORMED – AMHERST – HOLLIS – MILE SLIP AND DUXBURY SCHOOL FARM – CHARTER OF THE TOWN, AMENDMENTS TO CHARTER.

Milford was not incorporated until 1794, although settlements in the territory out of which the town was made began as early as 1738. In order to a good understanding of its geographical and civil history, it is necessary to go back two centuries and a half and note the changes in political jurisdiction which have been exercised upon its soil. Within less than forty years from the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, we find the Massachusetts colony granting farms and plantations upon the banks of the Merrimack, Nashua, and Souhegan rivers, to citizens who had distinguished themselves in civil and military affairs. This was done, not only as a reward for services rendered, but also as evidence of its claim to an extended domain.

November 12, 1659, the General Court of Massachusetts, upon petition of the town of Charlestown, granted for the benefit of its schools the tract of land known from that day as the "Charlestown school farm." Jonathan Danforth, a noted surveyor of the day, residing in Billerica, Massachusetts, was entrusted with the duty of locating the grant, and made return of his doings as follows:

"By virtue of an order of the General Court, laid out, for the use of the schools of Charlestown, one thousand acres of land, more or less, in the wilderness, on the western side of Merrimack River, at a place commonly called by the Indians Sowheaganucke, beginning at the foot of a great hill, and so extending eastward about two miles down the said river, and bounded with the river north, and by land laid out for Mrs. Anna Cole on the east, the wilderness elsewhere surrounded, according to marked trees, all which are sufficiently bounded with C, and is more fully demonstrated by a plat taken on the same.

By Jonathan Danforth, *Surveyor*."

This farm comprised the fine tract of land lying on the south side of the river between the west line of the homestead of Mathias F. Crosby and the bridge near Jones's Corner, and with an average width of three fourths of a mile. The town of Charlestown fortified its title by a deed from certain Indian chiefs which is recorded in the records of Middlesex county, Massachusetts, book 10, page 425.

The town of Charlestown held this grant without income until the year 1743, when it was purchased by Benjamin Hopkins of Billerica, Mass. The price paid was £ 375. Another grant of five hundred acres was made the same day to Mrs. Anna Cole, before that time the wife of one Robert Keayne, a prominent citizen of Boston, Mass., who had made substantial gifts to Harvard college and other educational and charitable institutions. This grant was bounded on the west by the Charlestown school farm, and extended easterly down the river as far as the stone dam of the Souhegan Manufacturing company near the manufactory of Howard, French & Heald. The width of the grant was some two hundred and twenty rods and was bounded on the north by the river its entire length.

Still another farm of five hundred acres was granted the same day to Anna Lane, a grand-daughter of Robert Keayne, some two hundred rods below the Cole farm. This grant was two hundred and eighty rods in length and on both sides of the river- two hundred acres on the north and three hundred on the south. Between these farms there was a tract containing some two hundred acres which was never granted as a farm; but after the grant of old Dunstable, Jonathan Blanchard became the owner of the tract with other adjoining land to the extent of about nine hundred acres. Below the Lane farm, on the same

day, a fourth grant was made to Captain William Davis of Boston, and Captain Isaiah Johnson of Roxbury, of five hundred acres lying on both sides of the river. A fifth grant was made of seven hundred acres adjoining the fourth, and on both sides of the river, to John Wilson, who, as the record says, had been disappointed in the laying out of a grant to him some twenty years before. These several grants up and down the river, including the Blanchard land, made a tract of unusually fertile land about six miles in length and not much less than one in width. The titles of the present owners have come down unquestioned from the original grantees, having been respected by the Masonian proprietors under their grant from the English crown and by our own state.

Very soon after these Souhegan grants were made, settlements commenced upon Salmon brook, in what is now Nashua, upon grants which had been made at a still earlier date. Naturally these grantees, and those who desired to settle on the farms granted, felt the need of township privileges. In accordance therewith, in 1673 they petitioned the general court and were incorporated, the township being named Dunstable, deriving its name from Dunstable in England, some of the proprietors being from the place.

Charter of Dunstable

The old township of Dunstable, which included the larger part of the present town of Milford, was chartered by the general court of Massachusetts, Oct. 16, 1673, O.S., corresponding to Oct. 27, 1673, N.S. More than one half of Dunstable, as chartered, was in the territory subsequently in dispute between the provinces of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, but at the date of its charter, and for more than sixty years afterwards, it was supposed to be wholly in Massachusetts, and formed a part of the county of Middlesex. It included within its chartered boundaries the present town of Tyngsborough, the east part of Dunstable, a narrow triangular gore on the north side of Pepperell, and a considerable tract in the northeast corner of Townsend, all still in Massachusetts. In the state of New Hampshire it embraced the towns of Litchfield and Hudson, the southwest part of Londonderry, and the west part of Pelham, on the east side of the Merrimack river; and on the west side of that river nearly all the present towns of Nashua and Hollis, all of Amherst and Merrimack south of the Souhegan river, and a large part of the towns of Milford and Brookline. The part of Dunstable west of the Merrimack was bounded, north by the Souhegan river, south by Chelmsford and Groton, as previously chartered, and in part by "country land" (land not then in a chartered town), and west by a line running due north from its southwest corner to Dram Cup hill, on the Souhegan, now in the town of Milford. The extreme length of the township from north to south, from the north line of Litchfield to Chelmsford, following the course of the Merrimack, was about seventeen miles; its least length, from the north line of Groton to the nearest point of Souhegan river, not far from ten miles. Its greatest breadth east and west could not have been less than sixteen miles, the whole comprising an area of two hundred square miles, or 128,000 acres.

In 1741, after a protracted controversy the line between the provinces of Massachusetts and New Hampshire was established by the king and a survey (claimed by the latter state to be inaccurate) made, locating the present boundary. The result of this decision was not acceptable to the settlers in the old town, who were by this decree transferred from the jurisdiction of Massachusetts to New Hampshire; but there was no appeal, and they soon accommodated themselves to the changed conditions.

Two years before the settlement of the line controversy, a parish was chartered within the limits of this old town, known as the west parish of Dunstable, which existed until the year 1746. These subdivisions of towns existed for the support of religious worship, and had only such powers as were needed to raise money for the erection of meeting-houses and the maintenance of the clergy.

The town of Amherst, which eventually made a large contribution to the territory of Milford, had its origin in a grant of a township to the soldiers and heirs of deceased soldiers who took part in the

expedition against Philip, the Indian chief, which resulted in his death and the destruction of the most powerful of the Indian tribes having permanent homes in New England. Each soldier, or the representatives of a soldier, had a share or lot. The township was called Narragansett No. 3; was granted in 1733, and was bounded on the south by the Souhegan river, its western limit being about two hundred and seventy rods east of the northwest corner of the Charlestown school farm. It was called Narragansett No. 3 or Souhegan West until 1760, when it was incorporated as Amherst.

In 1733 another farm was granted by the general court of Massachusetts to the town of Duxbury to aid in the support of a grammar school, and known from that date to the time of the incorporation of Milford as the Duxbury school farm. It was bounded as follows:

“Laid out five hundred acres of land to fulfill a grant made by the Great and General Court or Assembly to the Town of Duxbury, March ye 4th 1733: which bounds southerly n Souhegan river; west on the uppermost Narragansett Township upon said river. North and west upon the unappropriated lands. It begins at a white oak marked, (with a heap of stones near to it), on the north side of said river; about one hundred and thirty rods above the upper end of Charlestown School Farm and runs north two hundred rods; from thence east four hundred rods to said Narragansett Township; from thence south two hundred and seventeen rods to said Souhegan river and then it runs up along by said river to where it first began.

The Mile Slip was a tract of ungranted land extending from the Massachusetts line, as established in 1741, to the south line of Lyndeborough as originally granted, bounded on the west by Mason and Wilton, and having a width of something more than a mile.

Old Dunstable was granted to parties called “The proprietors of Dunstable,” who had corporate privileges and held the land not before granted within the limits of the town in common. The town was never divided into ranges and lots, but the proprietors from time to time sold or distributed among themselves lots of such size as suited the parties taking them. The proprietors continued to hold meetings and transact business for some time after the dismemberment of the ancient grant.

In addition to the Blanchcard farm the proprietors laid out in what is now Milford other large tracts of land. The Hartshorn farm, consisting of five hundred acres, extended from the easterly boundary of the Charlestown school farm along its south line for about three quarters of its length. The Brown lot or farm lay to the south and west of the Hartshorn farm, and for a short distance was bounded on the north by the Charlestown school farm. This tract contained one thousand acres.

In 1746 the western part of Dunstable in New Hampshire was divided by an easterly and westerly line into two nearly equal parts, and the towns of Hollis and Monson incorporated by the legislature of New Hampshire. Monson was bounded its entire length by the Souhegan river on the north for a distance of nearly seven miles, having for its northwest boundary the northwest corner of Old Dunstable near Dram Cup hill, and a width of some four miles. Hollis had about the same amount of territory directly south of Monson, including the larger part of what is now the town of Brookline.

Monson had a corporate existence of twenty-four years, when it was dismembered in 1770, and one half annexed by an east and west line to Amherst, and the remainder to Hollis.

In 1782 the inhabitants of the southwest part of Amherst, as then constituted, were set off as a parish, for the purpose maintaining religious worship. In 1792 the parish was regularly incorporated and boundaries established.

In 1794, the town of Milford was incorporated, Amherst making the largest contribution of territory, the Mile Slip the next, Hollis the third, and the Duxbury school farm closing up the lines with its five hundred acres.

Having given some account of the various tracts of land making up the town of Milford in 1794, let us read the charter:

STATE OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, 1794.

“In the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and ninety-four.

“An Act to incorporate the Southwesterly part of Amherst, the northwesterly part of Hollis, the Mile Slip and Duxbury School farm into a town, and to invest the inhabitants thereof with all such privileges and immunities as other towns in this State hold and enjoy.

“Whereas, a petition signed by a number of the inhabitants of the southwesterly part of Amherst, the northwesterly part of Hollis, the Mile Slip and Duxbury School farm (so called) had been preferred, setting forth that by an act of incorporation passed by the Legislature of this State, on the first day of June, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety-two, the southwest part of Amherst aforesaid was, by certain boundaries therein described, made a parish; that the tract of land therein contained is too small for a town; that the inhabitants of the Mile Slip and Duxbury School farm aforesaid are unable to support the Gospel, build bridges and maintain schools; that a number of the inhabitants of the northwesterly part of said Hollis could be better accommodated by being annexed to the southwest parish in Amherst. They, therefore, prayed that they might be incorporated and made a body Politic, with all the Corporate powers and privileges by law vested in other towns. And the Inhabitants of the town of Amherst, in legal Town-meeting, having voted their assent to the same;

“Therefore, Be it Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives, in General Court Convened, that all the lands and inhabitants within the following limits: viz., Beginning at the southwest corner of the northwest parish in Amherst aforesaid, on Lyndeborough East line, thence running easterly to the northeast corner of Amos Green’s lot, called the Mill lot; thence southerly on a straight line to the southwest corner of lot No. 20; thence easterly on the range line to the northeasterly corner of William Peabody’s land; thence southerly on the range line between John Shepherd, Esq., and William Peabody’s land until it comes to land belonging to the heirs of John Shepherd, late of said Amherst, deceased; thence easterly to the northeast corner of the same, joining to land of the same John Shepherd, Esp.; thence southerly, by land of John Shepherd, Esq., aforesaid, on the range line to Souhegan River; thence down the middle of said river till it strike land owned by Benjamin and Stephen Kindrick; thence southerly by said Kindrick land to the road leading from David Danforth’s to the town of Wilton; thence crossing the same and running a south point to Hollis Line, being near David Duncklee house, and then to the northeast corner of the land lately laid off from the said Hollis by their committee appointed for the above purpose; thence running south about twelve degrees east so as to strike the northeast corner of John Stearns’ land, it being the northwest corner of Robert Colburn’s land; thence on the same course until it comes to the southeast corner of said Stearns’ land; thence westerly, by said Stearns’ and William Haley land, until it comes to the northwest corner of said Haley land, thence westerly to the northeast corner of Mr. Gould’s land and so on westerly, by said Gould and David Danforth’s land, to said Gould’s northwest corner; thence turning southerly to the southeast corner of Robert Darrah’s land; thence west fifteen degrees south until it comes to Raby east line; thence northerly on said Raby east line until it comes to the south line of said Amherst; thence northerly on the north line of said Raby to the southwest corner of Amherst; thence southerly by the set line of Raby to the southeast corner of the Mile Slip; thence westerly to the southwest corner thereof; thence northerly on east line of Mason & Wilton to the northwest corner of the Mile Slip; thence easterly on the south line of Lyndeborough to the southeast corner thereof; thence northerly by the east line of Lyndeborough to the bound first mentioned. Be, and the same are hereby incorporated into a town by the name of Milford; and the inhabitants who reside and shall hereafter reside

within the before-mentioned boundaries are made and constituted a body politic and corporate, and invested with all the powers, privileges, and immunities which towns in this State by law are entitled to enjoy; to remain a distinct town and have continuance and succession forever. And be it further enacted that Augustus Balnchard, Esquire, be, and he hereby is, authorized and empowered to call a meeting of said inhabitants for the purpose of choosing all necessary Town Officers; and shall preside therein until a Moderator shall be chosen to govern said meeting, which shall be warned by posting up notice thereof at the Meeting-House in said Milford, fourteen days prior to the day of holding the same, and the annual meetings for the choice of Town Officers shall be holden on the first Tuesday of March annually.

“Provided always that nothing in this act contained shall, in any wise, release the inhabitants of the said Southwest Parish in Amherst (part of said Milford) from paying their proportion of all debts now due from the town of Amherst, or their proportion of the support of the Present Poor of said Town and Parish, or any taxes now assessed on them as inhabitants of the said Town of Amherst; but the same may be levied and collected from the inhabitants of the said Southwest Parish (now a part of Milford aforesaid) in the same way and manner as if this act had not been passed; and the present inhabitants of the said northwesterly part of said town of Hollis shall be liable to pay all taxes hereofore assessed on them as inhabitants of the town of Hollis, in the same way and manner as if this act had not been passed.

“In Senate, January 11, 1794. This bill having had three several readings, passed ot be enacted; sent down for concurrence. “Abiel Foster, President of the Senate.

“In the House of Representatives, the same day, the foregoing bill, having had a third reading, was enacted. “Nathaniel Peabody, Speaker.

“Approved 11th January, 1794. “Josiah Bartlett, Gov.”

Two additions to the limits of the town have been made since its incorporation. The first in 1842, of a tract taken from Amherst, bounded and described as follows:

“Commencing at a stone monument standing on the bank of Souhegan river on the divding line between Amherst and Milford; thence north on said dividing line 128 rods to a stone monument; thence south 69 degrees east 165 rods to a stake and stones on land of Daniel Holt, thence south 3 degrees east 218 rods to a white oak tree on the bank of Souhegan river; thence by said river to the bound first mentioned.”

The second in 1873, a small tract taken from Lyndeborough, described as follows:

“Beginning at a stake and stones, on the town line between Milford and Lyndeboro’, on the north side fo the highway leading from Milford to Lyndeboro’, thence running westerly by said north side of the highway about forty rods, thence southerly three rods to the south side of the highway, thence westerly by said south side of the highway thirteen rods to a stake and stones, thence southerly as the fence runs to the town line thirty-one and one fourth rods, thence easterly by said town line to the bound first mentioned.”

So well has the town guarded its domain, that no portion of its territory has been surrendered to the demands of ambitious neighbors.

From what has been said, it appears that all our territory south of the river (except the Mile Slip) was known as Dunstable prior to the year 1746; from that year until 1770 as Monson; from 1770 to 1794 as Amherst, and all upon the north side of the river prior to 1794, as Naragansit No. 3, Souhegan West, or Amherst, with the exception of a small part of the Mile Slip and the five hundred acres known as the Duxbury school farm.