

CHAPTER IV.

PERMANENT SETTLERS – PEABODY, SHEPHERD, HOPKINS, BURNS, NATHAN HUTCHINSONS, ABNER HUTCHINSON, TOWNE, JONES, BRADFORD, CROSBY, WALLACE – ADDITIONS FROM TIME TO TIME – CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EARLY SETTLERS – DWELLINGS – MANNER OF LIFE - EMPLOYMENT.

Although a settlement was begun within the limits of Milford upon its extreme southeastern border as early as 1738, it amounted to nothing, so far as the founding of a permanent community was concerned. Only indistinct remains of human habitations are left to mark the spot. The real settlement of the town began when, in 1740, William Peabody from Boxford, Mass., commenced to clear the farm upon the north side of the river, which remained in the family name more than one hundred years. This farm was one of the lots in Narragansett No. 3, and was awarded to his father, Stephen Peabody, on account of the services of his grandfather in King Philip's War.

William Peabody was a descendant of Lieut. Francis Peabody, who came from England in 1635 in the ship Planter, and from him have descended most of the families in New England of this name. This pioneer was succeeded upon the farm by his son William, and afterwards by his grandson Stephen – all men of ability and integrity. His son Stephen served with distinction in the Revolutionary war, having acted as adjutant of Col. Reeve's regiment at Bunker Hill; as aide for General Stark at Bennington, and as lieutenant-colonel in command of a battalion sent to Rhode Island in 1778. One of his daughters married Nathan Hutchinson, Jr., another Benjamin Hutchinson. His granddaughter, Hannah, was the wife of Rev. Humphrey Moore. His posterity in Milford and vicinity are numerous, although none of them bear his worthy name.

John Shepherd, a prominent citizen of Concord, Mass., in 1741, induced by an offer on the part of the proprietors of Souhegan West, settled on the north side of the river, erecting mills upon the present location of Gilson's saw-mill, near the present granite bridge. He built a cabin a little north of the Methodist church, and afterwards a house upon the spot where now stands the residence of Fred J. Kendall, and still later erected a more pretentious dwelling upon the site now occupied by the residence of Henry H. Barber.

The following is a copy of the vote of the proprietors of Souhegan West, passed April 30, 1741::

Voted, That the proprietors will give to Mr. John Shepherd one hundred and twenty acres of land to begin at William Peabody line and run down the river to the bottom of the falls and so wide as to make the one hundred and twenty acres . . . he building a good Grist Mill and a good saw mill on said Souhegan river against the aforesaid land, and to finish them by the last of November next, and keep them in good repair for the use of said proprietors, he giving a bond to our treasurer to comply with the same forthwith, he having the liberty to cut such white oak timber for the mill as he wants and has not of his own.

Mr. Shepherd was an honored citizen of the town and did much to establish business at the falls, as Milford village was called in those early days. He was succeeded by his son, John Jr., who was also prominent in public affairs, serving as colonel of the state militia and as one of the judges of the inferior court of common pleas for the county of Hillsborough. His granddaughter Sarah married William Crosby, many of whose descendants are at present occupying positions of responsibility in town. Andrew N. Shepherd, or East Milford, is a great-great-grandson of the original settler.

As early as 1745, Benjamin Hopkins, of Billerica, Massachusetts, who had purchased the Charlestown school farm of the town of Charlestown, Mass., in 1743 for three hundred and seventy-five pounds, had

established his home upon the eastern part of this most beautiful and fertile tract of land. His dwelling was located on the bank of the brook, about fifty rods north of the residence of the late Luke Smith, and about the same distance from the west line of the farm of the late William Ramsdell. It was build of logs, and was bullet-proof. Mr. Hopkins was forty-four years old when he build this fort-like structure, and had a wife and eight children. On the north side of the river lived William Peabody and John Shepherd. On the south he had no neighbors than Thomas and William Nevins, some four or five miles distant. Mr. Hopkins was a man of marked individuality and a controlling spirit among his neighbors. His oldest son married Anna Powers, the first white child born in Hollis. His daughter Deborah married Caleb Jones, one of the early settlers. His descendants have been and are among the influential citizens of the town, and are still in possession of a part of the farm purchased by their ancestor in 1743. Mr. Hopkins died at the advanced age of eighty-six years; his wife and the age of ninety-three. Their remains rest in the old cemetery at Amherst.

John Burns, of Scotch origin, born in 1700, came to America from the north of Ireland in 136, and settled in the south part of the town soon after Benjamin Hopkins made his home upon the banks of the Souhegan. Mr. Burns was one of the leading men in the town of Monson from its organization in 1746; but from the fact that his name is not to be found on the records of the town of Dunstable or the parish of West Dunstable, I conclude that his residence in town did not commence much before the year 1746, although he had at the time been the owner of his farm for three or four years and had cultivated some portions of it during this time while a resident of Nottingham West. It is said that upon his original location he built the first framed house in town and that the structure is still in existence upon the farm of Eli S. Burns. The remains of the cellar of his original cabin are still visible a few rods east of the buildings on the farm of George W. Duncklee, about one mile and a half south of the town-house on the Brookline road.

Mr. Burns was in the prime of life when he took up his abode in town. He brought with him a numerous family, and was a worthy representative of the Scotch_english race upon American soil. His descendants have remained in town in large numbers, contributing their full share to its character and prosperity, the seventh generation now occupying portions of the original purchase of their ancestor.

In 1744, Benjamin Hopkins sold to Nathan Hutchinson of Billerica, Mass., a section of the "Charlestown school farm" of the width of fifty rods. This farm is now owned by Edwin D. Searles. Mr. Hutchinson established himself upon his farm in 1748, being, at the time, thirty-one years old, and a descendant of Richard Hutchinson who came to America in 1634. Richard was the ancestor of most of his name who have lived in town. (Timothy Hutchinson the ancestor of Royal, Henry, Franklin, Elliot, and John B., did not locate here until 1787.) From the day of his settlement here, until the day of his decease in 1795, Nathan Hutchinson was one of the most active and useful citizens of the town. Upon a map of New Hampshire published in 1784, his name, and that of John Shepherd, appear in connection with the locality in which they resided, indicating, perhaps, their prominence in public estimation. His posterity have been and are numerous and influential in town affairs.

Abner Hutchinson from Salem, Mass., a descendant of the same Richard, but not very nearly related to Nathan, soon after settled upon a farm on the north side of the river, above the Peabody place and near the residence of the late John Bartlett, a man of sterling character and a worthy associate of the men he found as neighbors. Among his descendants now living in town may be named Dea. George F. Bartlett.

Elisha Towne, born in Topsfield, Mass., bough a tract of land, including what is now the East Milford railroad station, in 1748, and not long after built a house about fifty rods north of the crossing. The spot where the buildings stood can be identified by the evidences of the existence of a cellar at some former

time. He was a brother of Israel Towne, an early settler in Amherst upon the farm now owned by Frank W. Chase.

Caleb Jones, another of the early settlers, emigrated from Wilmington, Mass., soon after Benjamin Hopkins located on the Charlestown school farm. He was but twenty years of age and spent some time at work for Hopkins, whose daughter Deborah he subsequently married. Jones took up a claim upon the ungranted lands of the Mile Slip, a little southwest of the present residence of William Jones, his descendant. He was possessed of good mental powers and a most eccentric disposition.

Andrew Bradford, from Middleton, Mass., another pioneer, settled upon the farm in the north part of the town now owned by J. Fitch Crosby. His son, Capt. John Bradford, commanded a company at the Battle of Bennington, where he received honorable mentions for his bravery. His grandson, Ephraim Bradford, for many years the pastor of the church at New Boston, was one of the ablest clergymen of our state. Andrew died at the age of eighty years in 1798.

In 1753, Capt. Josiah Crosby, ad descendant of Simon Crosby who came over in 1635, in the ship Susan and Ellyn, at the age of twenty-three years, left his native town, Billerica, Mass., and with his wife (Sarah Fitch, of Bedford, Mass.) established a home upon the farm now owned by his great-grandson, M.F. Crosby. Mr. Crosby at once took a leading part in the affairs of the town. He had in 1748 served in the French and Indian War, and was an officer in the War of the Revolution, commanding a company at Bunker Hill. His son William married the daughter of John Shepherd, and was one of the most honored and useful citizens the town has had. Many descendants of this worthy soldier remain in town and have had a substantial part in the management of its affairs.

William Wallace, son of Joseph Wallace, emigrated with his father at the age of five years from Londonderry, N.H., and William was here as early as 1754. He married a daughter of John Burns, Sr., and had his home upon the north side of the river near the residence of the late David Hutchinson, on the old Mont Vernon road. Wallace had all the rugged traits of his ancestry; was the father of Dea. John Wallace, and the grandfather of Dr. John Wallace. The family has been well represented in town since the arrival of the first emigrant.

These eleven men, with wives who were helpmeets indeed, were all settled upon our soil before the year 1755, and were in the front ranks of the founders of the town of Milford. There were, in fact, but few other inhabitants within our limits at this early day. Of these forefathers it can be remarked, that as a whole they were men of uncommon strength of character; that all had honorable careers; that, without exception, they remained in town, and were buried by their children.

Jonathan Towne, a younger brother of Elisha, settled upon the old Town farm on the Nashua road, about half a mile northwest of his brother, in 1759. He died in military service at Crown Point in 1776. He was the grandfather of the late William B. Town, to whose well directed zeal in historical matters are productive labor upon the early history of Milford families, we are much indebted in the preparation of this work.

Ebenezer Pearson, son of Thomas, born at Wilmington, Mass., May 14, 1736, located upon the Duxbury school farm in 1762, and was the grandfather of Luther, Dimon, and James Pearson.

One hundred and fifty years have passed since these men began their work. Upon all sides was an unbroken wilderness, but with dauntless resolution they betan to subdue great forests and to utilize the winding stream upon whose banks they had made their settlement. These men had come to stay, and to make comfortable homes for themselves and those who should follow them. How well that work was

begun, and how well carried on by their successors, let the smooth fields so heavily walled with granite boulders, the comfortable farm buildings, and the unusually attractive village residences witness.

The pioneers were reinforced from time to time by those who, like themselves, had a mind to work, and the names of Averill, Blanchard, Burnham, Abbott, Grimes, Hobbs, Taylor, Gould, Tuttle, Spalding, Stearns, Howe, Duncklee, Barker, Bartlett, Badger, French, Gutterson, Howard, Lovejoy, Marvell, Merrill, Wright, Johnson, Knowlton, Hood, Buxton, Clark, Conant, Flinn, Foster, Goodwin, Lewis, Lund, Melendy, Osgood, Colburn, are a few of the many who took up and carried on the work so well laid out by those who were first upon the ground. One, two, three generations have passed since the coming of the fathers, and time has buried many memorials of them and their work, and it is difficult to reproduce the scene as Peabody and Shepherd looked upon it.

In smaller and less prosperous towns we walk about the streets and within the ancient burial-places where "The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep,"

With a feeling akin to that experienced in visiting old and decayed countries, and can hardly suppress the words "Iliumfuit," for all about us are evidences that at some former time there was more thrift, intelligence, and solid acquisition than at present. But in our own history it can truthfully be said that much as the present is debtor to the past, and much as we revere the men who laid the foundations of present prosperity, their descendants, with new blood from almost every quarter of the compass, are proving themselves equal to the task of making the town all that has been hoped for and prophesied of it in the past.

Let us, as well as we may, call to mind something of the everyday life of the families of Hopkins, Hutchinson, and Burns a century and a half ago. Their houses were of the rudest kind, made at first of logs and afterwards of rough lumber, with few windows, and almost bare of furniture. Having made extended allusion in our sketch of the old town of Monson to the hardships experienced by the early settlers, liable at any time before 1760 to an Indian assault, we refrain from again introducing the subject, only remarking, in passing, that during all the time of the French and Indian war every settler's cabin was to some extent a fortified place. Clocks and stoves were not known at that early day, the hour-glass and huge oven doing the housewife good service. Books, aside from the Bible, were seldom found. Many of the first settlers located near a brook, that water might easily be obtained. Wells were afterwards dug as prosperity increased, and water was drawn by a pail attached to a pole, and still later the well-curb with the "sweep" and "The old oaken bucket, The iron-bound bucket, The moss-covered bucket which arose from the well," came into use. Carpets and wall papers were things unknown in these early homes, a floor covered with clean white sand being the ambition of our good mothers.

In such abodes as these were born and reared large families of eight, ten, and in some instances, sixteen children, most of whom grew to be strong men and faithful women. It was the mother's care to keep the fire on the hearth-stone continually alive, so difficult was it to start a new fire; and so night and day, winter and summer, it went on. The introduction of the friction match (about 1830) was a blessing seldom realized in its fullness. The fireplaces, as many remember, were often capacious enough to take in logs four feet in length. The keeping-room, sitting or living-room, as it was known to different families, was often dependent upon the open fire for light. Tallow candles, dipped, or run in moulds, were the articles succeeding the pine knot for light, and were in time superseded by whale oil, which in turn gave way to the kerosene of to-day. The huge fireplace in the great chimney had its crane, upon which hung pots and kettles in close proximity to the fire. And the brick oven-what an addition it was to the house! It took a long time to heat it and it was usually done but once a week-but how much could be turned out at one baking of bread, beans, and pies! All of us remember the brick oven, and some the tin oven, which was used for baking in front of a blazing fire, and a few the Dutch oven, a shallow cast-iron kettle with a cover. Wooden milk-pans and dash churns were the dairy utensils in early use. Wild game was at hand in

abundance, and fish, including the salmon, were found in the waters of the Souhegan. There is a tradition in the family of the writer that the wife of William Peabody, Sr., as she was crossing the river at the falls at the eastern boundary of the Charlestown school farm, caught a salmon with her hands, as it was working its way up the stream in the shallow water, which made a dinner for a large party. It is said the Captain Josiah Crosby killed nine bears the first year of his residence in town. The meat of the bear and deer, reinforced by the product of the river, did much to break up the monotony of a salt-pork dinner with its alternate salt beef. More than once there was a grand moose hunt. Soon after Elisha Hutchinson, the grandfather of the family of singers of that name, had located in the northwest part of the town (1779), a huge moose made his appearance in his clearing. Hutchinson and his neighbors gave chase, and captured the animal; the meat, regarded as choice because rare, was divided among the captors and their friends.

Cider was common drink, farmers often putting as many as thirty barrels into the cellar, to be used for vinegar and as a beverage in about the ratio of one to thirty. There were no pleasure wagons, and none of the modern farm implements were in use. Ploughs had the mouldboard of wood covered with scraps of iron. Wooden shovels, shod with the same material, were in use; pitchforks of wrought iron were heavy and unwieldy; hoes were of the same construction; straight scythe snatches were in use at the commencement of the century. There was very little money in circulation during these early times and the strictest economy was practiced. Men, boys, and girls went barefoot in summer, and on Sunday would carry their shoes as they went to church, putting them on when near their destination and removing them as they commenced their homeward journey.

Burns and Wallace had come from a flax-producing country, and naturally took to the cultivation of this farm product. Their neighbors followed their example, and soon every farm had its field of flax. The flax had to be rotted, broken, and swungled, in order to be in condition for combing and carding. It was spun on the little wheels which we occasionally see in our modern houses as a choice to memento the past. There were also large wheels for the spinning of wool. These were prominent articles in the house-furnishing of those days, and poor indeed was the family which did not have one or more of them, as well as a loom upon which was woven fine linen for sheets and table cloths, which were allowed to accumulate as an important item in the daughters' dowries. The tailor of these times, with his goose, was engaged to come to the house and make up the cloth for the men and boys of the family; later, the work was done by women who made the circuit. Dressmakers were not known, the females of every family doing their own sewing. What traveling was not done on foot was accomplished on horseback, the husband in the saddle and the wife on the pillion behind, with the addition sometimes of a child or two—all on one horse.

Shepherd's mill at the fordway, from the beginning, was worth everything to these families. In many parts of the country, at this time, men carried grain upon their shoulders ten and even twenty miles to mill.

Of schools, before the Revolution, not much can be said. The heads of the family or a private instructor took the place of the regularly installed schoolmaster as he afterwards appeared. The nearest meeting-house, until about the close of the century, was at Amherst Plain, and the Sunday-school was institution of the then future.

What can we say of the domestic life and social comforts of this portion of the history of our town? So far as we can judge, from what had come down to us, there was as much of genuine happiness experienced by the occupants of these lands and tenements one hundred years ago, as by those who to-day read with surprise of the deprivations and straitened circumstances of earlier days. Common dangers and hardships were powerful factors in bringing together all the members of the neighborhood. Every man needed the assistance and fellowship of those who were circumstanced like himself. "A fellow feeling makes one wondrous kind." Out of these conditions there arose an almost Utopian state of society, in which selfishness and exclusiveness had but small part. The families of the first settlers intermarried in

many instances, and it will be a matter of surprise to many who examine the genealogical tables of this volume to find themselves related to those whom they never thought of as kinsmen.

The Puritan element in the character of the early settlers of the town had about the right amount of Scotch-Irish blood in combination to make a strong and enduring foundation upon which to build a town, a state, or a nation.