

History of Waterboro

Compiled by Willis Lord, 1987

The discovery of New England may justly be credited to Bartholomew Gosnold, an enterprising and intelligent navigator, who in the year 1602 performed a voyage to this part of North America before unknown to the civilized world. On the petition of a number of gentlemen, a charter was granted by King James of England in the year 1606, dividing the country into two districts; called North and South Virginia and authorizing the establishment of separate colonies in each by two district companies. The second colony, consisting chiefly of persons resident at Plymouth and other towns in the west of England and thence became the Plymouth Colony, were allowed to choose a place of settlement between 38 and 45 degrees, north latitude. In the year 1616, Sir Fernando Gorges sent hither a party commanded by Richard Vines for the express object of exploring the country with view to form a settlement. The place chosen at that time by Mr. Vines was at the mouth of the Saco River which was later given the name of Winter Harbor. Among those at Winter Harbor was a Major William Phillips who was admitted a freeman at Boston in 1640. Besides speculating in wild lands, Major Phillips became extensively engaged in lumbering.

A large tract of land was purchased by Major Phillips from the Indian Sagamore Fluellan in 1661, eight miles square, comprising nearly all of the present towns of Waterboro, Sanford and Alfred. Major Phillips died in Boston in 1683. By his last will, he bequeathed his lands to his widow and sons Samuel and William. Under the wills of the latter, the title to the territory passed to a propriety of ten members, one of whom was Colonel Josiah Waters for whom the town was named.

The territory was surveyed and plotted into lots by James Warren, a land surveyor and sold to settlers. This territory and a portion of Alfred were commonly spoken of as Massabesic Plantation, taking that name from what is now Shaker Pond then called Massabesick Pond which derived its name from the Indian Chief residing on its western shore. Ossipee Pond in the central part of the town, having an area of over one thousand acres made this name an appropriate one for the territory from the fact that the word itself means the land of much still waters.

The town contains 22,928 acres of land and 3,563 acres covered by water. Its latitude is approximately 44 degrees north of the Equator and its longitude is 70 1/2 degrees west of Greenwich.

Its first settler was Captain John Smith, who was born in Kittery, December 12, 1744, and resided here from 1768 until his death. Within two years seven families joined him. William Philpot came to the area from Somersworth, N.H., in 1769. He served in the Revolutionary War and after the war came back to Waterboro. He and his wife gave property to the Shakers and went there to live. His son William settled on a ridge east of Waterboro Center which is frequently called Warrens or Roberts Ridge. Alexander Jellerson and his son George came to Massabesick in October of 1769 from Doughtys Falls, now North Berwick. He settled about one half mile southeasterly of the present

day East Waterboro village. Son George settled not far from his father on what is known as the Mast Camp Road (Route 202 & 4). In this area many tall pines were harvested for the Kings ships. John Scribner settled in the north side of Federal St. just over the Waterboro line from Alfred. Robert Harvey, it is said, settled part of town on the road west of the present Route # 5. This road today is known as the Clarks Bridge Road. William Deering moved to Waterboro in 1770. They were the first to clear land on what is today known as Deering Ridge. The property is still owned by descendants of the original settlers and I have worked the fields since 1953. A Monument was erected in 1896 and reads as follows:

"This commemorates the Settlement of this farm June 17, 1770 by William Deering, born December 25, 1748 at Pine Point Scarborough, Maine. In 1773, he married Sarah Rumery and brought her here on horseback. On this spot was built a log cabin, their first home. Theirs was the courage and perseverance of the Pioneer.

This solid granite monument can be seen from the road which passes by the farmstead. William Nason emigrated from Enfield, N.H. in 1770. He settled on what is now known as the Bagley Road just opposite Little Ossipee Lake. The stone walls on the property attest to the amount of work. As mentioned before, John Smith was our earliest settler and resided in Waterboro until his death. He was always known as Captain John Smith because of his war background. He settled in what is known as Old Corner in Waterboro. He was prominent in town affairs, and his dwelling house was used for the first town meeting in 1787. He held public office all his life.

For many years town meetings were alternated between Captain Smiths dwelling and Jeremiah Browns residence in the north part of town. The settling of Waterboro was slow because of the Revolutionary War. In 1784 there were 184 people in town. At that time there was a rough logging road running on the west side of Massabesic (now Shaker Pond) to the Old Corner, where it forked, one branch running to Carles Corner (Ossipee Hill Road) and the other going to Ross Corner (West Road).

The town was incorporated on March 6, 1787 and named Waterborough. The Old Corner section, being the oldest section, had many of the firsts in town. The Old Corner church was organized in 1791, and the present building was built in 1803. Old Corner was also the place of the first school, where in 1784 Samuel Robinson had his first class in a barn. In 1790 the Court of General sessions was moved to Waterborough south of Old Corner. In 1805 the Court was moved to Alfred.

The second and largest settlement was known as Carles Corner (now Waterborough Center) due to the many Carles that were settled in the area. John Carle, the first settler was elected Hayward and Fence Viewer at the First Town Meeting. His son, Peter, built the first Tavern which was located in front of the Neal Taylor residence. The town continued to prosper and grow in the early years of the 1800s due largely to logging, farming and the local sawmills.

In 1800 Josiah Swett, a carpenter from Wells, moved to the town and built a cabin high

up on the easterly slope of Ossipee Mountain which was covered with white and red oak, beech and birch trees. In 1818 Josiah and his son William used the lumber from the forest and built a two masted schooner named Waterboro displacing better than fifty tons. Because the schooner had to be transported to Kennebunk Landing on the seacoast, using the principle of the well-known drag or stoneboat, they built a monster scoot or cradle to support this two-master and awaited the first snowfall. When conditions were satisfactory, the Swetts called on the farmers of this and adjoining towns who responded with fifty yokes of oxen for the trip. With the feed for the animals and a barrel of rum for the ox chauffeurs, soon the procession was in good motion towards Old Corner and rested the first night near Shaker Pond. Three days were required for the trip and it was accomplished without any accidents. William Swett, 20 years old, was her Captain and he made many trips along the coast and to the West Indies before she was sold.

The Elder Grey Meeting House was built in 1806 near the foot of Ossipee Pond between the now residence of Rev. Chandler Holmes and the New Dam Road. In later years the pastor, who lived on the far side of the ridge, stated that he was unable to make the trip up and down the hill so the congregation decided to move the Meeting House nearer to his residence--a distance of two miles. By the time the hoses and cattle with their load reached the top of the hill, the men were tired, tow chains were broken, the crew decided they had met Elder Grey half way and the Meeting House was deposited on its present site. Land for the site was given by Joseph Bradeen, and land for the cemetery across the road was given by Colonel Samuel Bradeen. This building is the only historical building in town listed in the National Archives of Historical Buildings. An active association keeps the Meeting House and cemetery in repair and services are conducted the first Sunday in August, every year.

In October, 1819, two Waterboro citizens were delegates to the convention in Portland, Maine, when Maine split from Massachusetts to become a Free State. They were Samuel Bradeen and Henry Hobbs. The number of delegates was based on population of the community.

The present Town House was built in 1834 as a church, being known as the Carles Corner Meeting House. It was purchased from the religious society and was used continuously until the late 1970s for our Annual Town Meetings. It was also the first high school in town and was also used as a theatre at one time. A large addition for Tax Collector, Treasurer, Town Clerk and Selectmens Offices, a new stage, conference rooms and toilet facilities were constructed in 1976.

The town continued to grow and the population in 1855 was 1,989. The Assessors determined the valuation of the land to be \$209,970.00. The rate of taxation was 20 mills. There were 278 poll tax payers. The highways were divided into 52 districts with 52 town officials called Surveyors. This was the peak population for many years and reached a low of 914 in 1930 before it began to rise again. Population for the years 1860 to 1930 is as follows:

- 1860 -- 1,825

- 1870 -- 1,548
- 1880 -- 1,482
- 1890 -- 1,357
- 1900 -- 1,169
- 1910 -- 997
- 1920 -- 942
- 1930 -- 914

The Civil War disrupted the town from 1860 to 1865. One hundred and twenty-five men served their country during this struggle. Many lives were lost and many came home wounded and sick to start life anew.

In 1868 the Boston & Maine R.R. started constructing the Portland to Rochester division, this line ran both freight and passenger service. Passenger service was discontinued in 1932, the Sanford to Rochester, N.H., section was eliminated in 1949 with the rest of the line going out of service in 1961.

In 1895, on the petition of Josiah N. Jones and 30 others, the spelling of the towns name was shortened to its present spelling by an act of the State Legislature. In 1911 fire burned a large portion of South Waterboro village on the main street (Route 202 & 4) from the intersection of the West Road north towards East Waterboro. Buildings on all sides of the intersection also burned.

1916 brought the need for Waterboros men to again bear arms and 14 men went to serve their country in World War I.

In 1920, a political occurrence in the town that will be long remembered was the coup that was successfully conducted by the young stalwarts of the town aided by one of the worst snowstorms experienced in half a century. Six feet of the feathery whiteness greeted travelers everywhere and brisk winds had piled snow to a depth of ten feet in many places. Roads were impassable and businesses were at a complete standstill.

The Republicans had controlled the town offices since 1884 and some of the young fry decided the time was ripe for action. Accordingly a full ticket of new faces for offices selected and the morrow anxiously awaited. Telephone communication was a bit interrupted by crossing up the wires, as it was felt that knowledge of what was being done could profitable be curtailed. The next morning dawned bright and fair, and at 10 o'clock 25 had found some way to master the avalanche of snow.

To comply with the requirements of law was a matter of but short duration, and in less than one hour all appropriations were made and a complete political house cleaning had taken place. The following day saw a meeting of those booted out of office who threatened court proceedings in the hope of ousting the new Citizens Officials, but their efforts were to no avail and for the following ten years the citizens elected all of their candidates for town offices. One of the ring leaders of the coup, Ernest G. Knights, was

elected to 27 consecutive terms as Treasurer and Tax Collector. He was one of six men who were elected to the State Senate, along with 39 men who have served as State Representatives from Waterboro since Maine became a State.

In 1922-23 the Goodall - Sanford Mills built a spinning mill next to the railroad tracks in Waterboro Village. It remained in production for about 5 years, and when the demand for their products lessened, the mill was closed. The Mill remained closed until 1939 when a Patent Leather business, owned by Al Petersen from Woburn, Mass., reopened the mill. The townspeople made economic concessions which helped get the leather business off the ground and running. The mill provided work for many Waterboro residents for several years but again closed in 1982.

Waterboro High School (now Massabesic Medical Center) was built in 1922 at a cost of \$27,790.44. The building housed all eight grades for the Waterboro Village area along with the 4 year High School. In 1952 an agreement was made with Sanford to take all of Waterboro High School students, transportation and tuition to be paid by the town of Waterboro.

Waterboro students remained at Sanford until S.A.D. #57 was formed in 1966 and a new Jr.-Sr. High School was completed and opened in 1969. As population grew in the district (Alfred, Limerick, Newfield, Shapleigh, Lyman and Waterboro), a Junior High School was built in 1974. In 1979 because of the population explosion a new Elementary School was built in Waterboro Center and at the present time two portable classrooms have been added to house the students. In 1986 a large addition to the High School was completed.

Sunday December 7, 1941 brought drastic changes when Pearl Harbor was bombed in a surprise attack by the Japanese. The life styles of 128 men and women took on a new meaning as they went off to World War II. The majority of those left at home went to work in the South Portland Shipyards and other defense plants to produce ships and materials needed to achieve a Victory in 1945.

The hot dry summer of 1947 no doubt brought about the greatest catastrophe the town has known to date. On October 21-23, the great forest fire swept through to town. When the smoke cleared nearly three quarters of the land area had been burned. Almost ninety percent of the cottages on Ossipee Lake were burned, many homes in Waterboro Village, East Waterboro and North Waterboro were ravaged and many farmsteads in outlying areas were gone forever.

The annual register of Maine shows that after a low of 914 in 1930, population in 1940 rose to 947, 1950--1,070 and dropped a little in 1960 to 1,059, in 1970--1,208 with a valuation of \$4,359,855. By 1980 the population had ballooned to 2,943 with a valuation of \$59,050,000. 1985 brought a population of approximately 4,000 with a valuation of \$86,150,000. Forty-seven residents of Waterboro were involved in the Korean War and seventy-three men and women saw action in Vietnam.

In 1986 the last full time resident farmer, Willis Lord, sold his beef herd, thus ending over 150 years of continual farming by many residents of the town. It was the end of another era of Waterboro history.