

Researching Colonial New England Ancestors

Settlement of Colonial New England

Sheilagh Doerfler, Genealogist



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Meet today's presenter



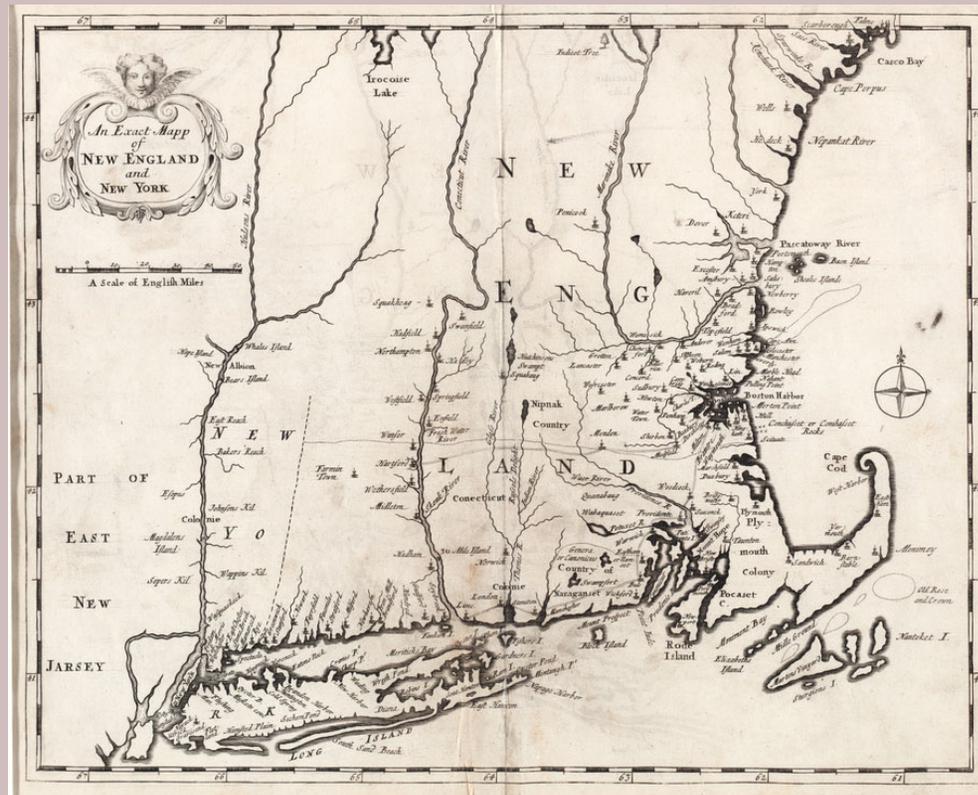
Sheilagh Doerfler
Genealogist

OVERVIEW

- **Presentation (60 mins.)**
 - Reasons for Immigration
 - Establishment of Communities
 - Management of Communities
 - Expansion and Migration
- **Q&A (30 mins.)**

Settlement of Colonial New England

- Reasons for immigration
- Establishment and management of communities
- Expansion and migration



Reasons for Immigration

The Great Migration

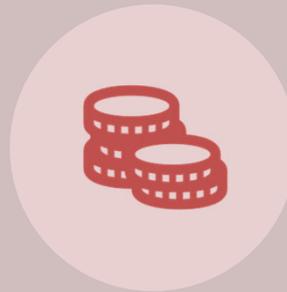
- 1620 to 1640
- Roughly 20,000 English immigrants settled in New England



Reasons for Immigration



RELIGIOUS



ECONOMIC



POLITICAL

Religious

- Church of England established in 1534
 - Retained too many Roman Catholic practices
 - Corrupt
- Simplification of church practices; reform
 - Puritans
- Complete break from Church of England
 - Separatists

Religious

- 1620: Separatists/Pilgrims set sail for New World
 - Plymouth Colony
- 1630s: Puritan migration to New World
 - John Winthrop leads first wave of Puritans to Massachusetts Bay Colony

Economic

- Land
- Natural resources
- Trade
- Opportunity for economic mobility

Political

- England in debt
 - Extravagant spending by former monarchs
- Crown needs to raise revenue
 - Taxes
- Charles I dissolves Parliament in 1629
 - Personal Rule



Immigrants to New England

- Middle Class
- Literate
- Family Groups
- Skilled



Establishment of Communities

Charter

- Legal document that granted establishment of colony
- Given to group of individuals
- Granted by King



Council for New England

- Charter granted by James I in 1620
- Granted land between 40 and 48 North latitude
 - Sea to sea
- Governed and managed settlement and trade of colony
- Distributed about 30 grants before disbandment in 1635

Plymouth Colony

- Granted patent by Virginia Company of London in 1620
 - Permission to settle in dominion of Jamestown
- Landed at Plymouth
 - Controlled by Council for New England
- Drafted Mayflower Compact
- Received permission to settle from Council for New England in 1621

Massachusetts Bay Colony

- Established in 1628
- Joint-stock company
 - Shares can be bought and sold
- Included portions of Maine, New Hampshire, and Connecticut
- Charter revoked in 1684; Dominion of New England
 - Bring all colonies under Crown control

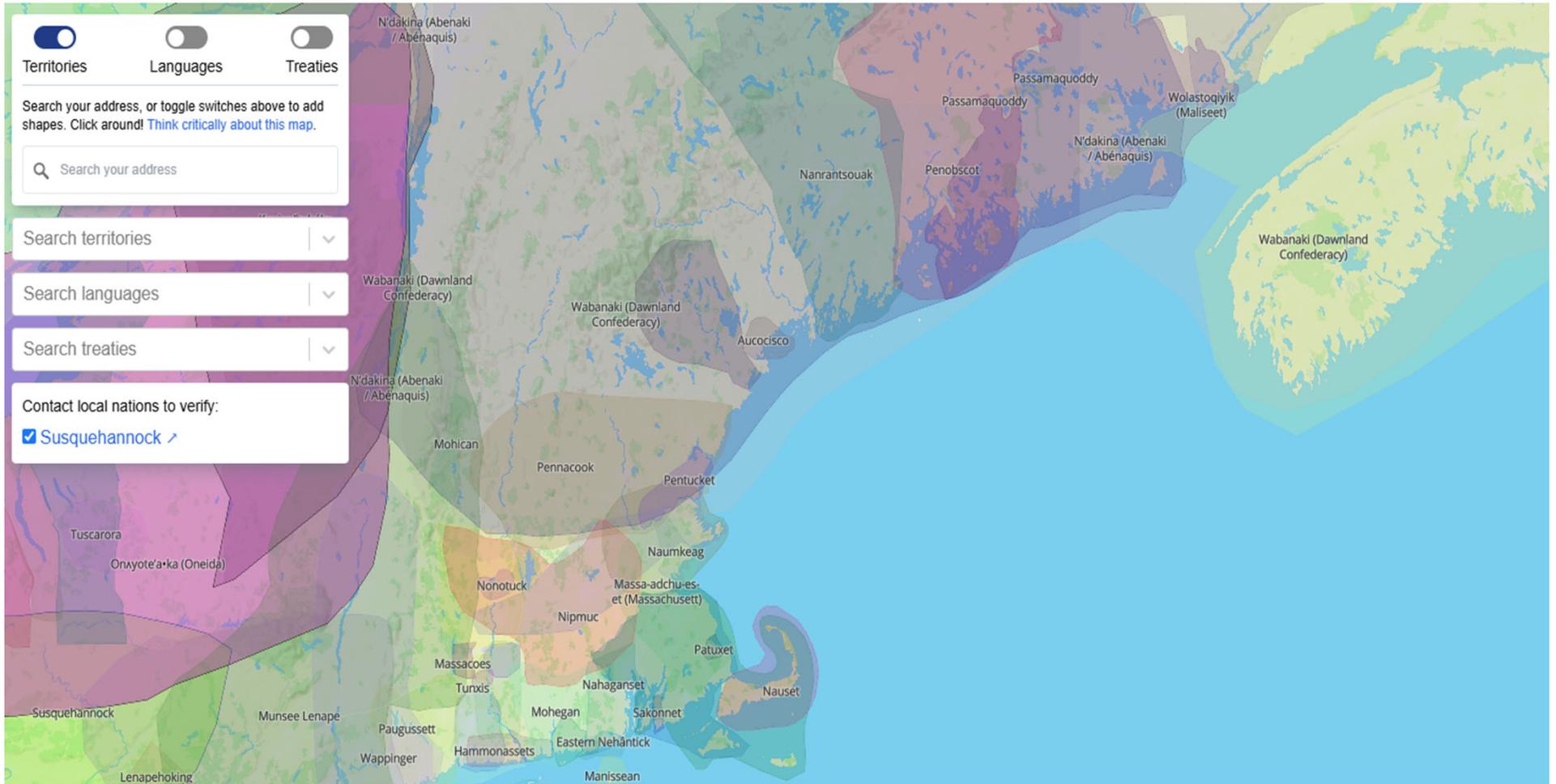
Massachusetts Bay Colony

- No headright land grant system
- Strove for shared ideals amongst settlers
- Community based settlements
- Massachusetts Bay General Court becomes steward of community land grants

Strategic Settlement

- Coastal
- Water source
- Fertile soil
- Pasturage
- Natural Resources
 - Lumber
 - Fur





The screenshot displays the Native Land Digital website interface. On the left, there is a control panel with three toggle switches for 'Territories', 'Languages', and 'Treaties'. Below these are search boxes for 'Search your address', 'Search territories', 'Search languages', and 'Search treaties'. A section titled 'Contact local nations to verify:' includes a checked checkbox for 'Susquehannock'. The main area is a map of the Northeastern United States, color-coded by territory. Labels on the map include: N'dakina (Abenaki / Abénaquis), Passamaquoddy, Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Nanrantsouak, Penobscot, Wabanaki (Dawnland Confederacy), Aucocisco, Mohican, Pennacook, Pentucket, Tuscarora, Oniyote'a•ka (Oneida), Nonotuck, Naumkeag, Massa-adchu-es-et (Massachusetts), Nipmuc, Patuxet, Nauset, Susquehannock, Munsee Lenape, Paugussett, Wappinger, Massacoos, Tunxis, Mohegan, Nahaganset, Sakonnet, Eastern Nehántick, Manissean, and Lenapehoking.

Native-Land.ca

Indigenous Peoples

- Diseases decimate population of Indigenous Peoples in southern New England in 1610s
 - Abandoned settlements
 - Cleared fields
- Early settlers depend on local tribes for trade
 - Fur
- Advantageous trade relationships established

Creation of New Towns

- Groups petition governing bodies to create new towns
 - More land
 - Disagreements
- Seeking prime lands in new communities
- Founders controlled land allotments and divisions

Creation of New Towns

1. Survey of land
2. Infrastructure
3. Petition
4. Recruit settlers
5. Distribute land



Concord

It is ordered, that there shalbe a plantaçõn att Musketequid, & that there shalbe 6 myles of land square to belong to it, & that the inhabitants thereof shall have three yeares imunities from all pubt charges, except traineings; ffurther, that when any that plant there shall have occaçõn of carryeing of goods thither, they shall repaire to two of the nexte magistrates where the teames are, whoe shall haue power for a yeare to presse draughts, att reasonable rates, to be payde by the owners of the goods, to transport their goods thither att seasonable tymes; & the name of the place is changed, & hereafter to be called Concord.

*Records of the Governor and Co. of the
Massachusetts Bay In New England*

Massachusetts Archives

General Information

Research & Reference

Collections

Records Management

State Historical Records Advisory Board

[Home](#) > [Massachusetts Archives](#) > Records of the Governor and Company

Records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England

The records of the Governor and Company of the Massachusetts Bay in New England preserve efforts made by English migrants to organize, settle, and govern the Massachusetts colony. These records, beginning in 1628, document the proceedings of the colony's governing body, the General Court.

Contained within five manuscript volumes, the records of the General Court include legislative acts, judicial decisions, lists of freemen, correspondence, and other documents.

The original 17th century manuscript records have been transcribed and published as:

Nathaniel B. 17th d., Records of the Governor & Company of the Massachusetts bay in New England, 5 vols., (Boston: William White, 1853-1854)

Volumes

- ▶ Volume 1: Records of the General Court, 1628-1641
- ▶ Volume 2: Records of the General Court, 1642-1649
- ▶ Volume 3: Records of the House of Deputies, 1644-1657
- ▶ Volume 4, Part 1: Records of the General Court: 1650-1660
- ▶ Volume 4, Part 2: Records of the General Court: 1661-1674
- ▶ Volume 5: Records of the General Court, 1674-1686

<https://www.sec.state.ma.us/divisions/archives/collections/governor-company.htm>

QUESTIONS?

A large audience of people is seated in a conference room, viewed from behind. They are facing a presentation screen at the front of the room. The room has a patterned wall and a ceiling with recessed lighting. The overall image has a dark red overlay.

Management of Communities

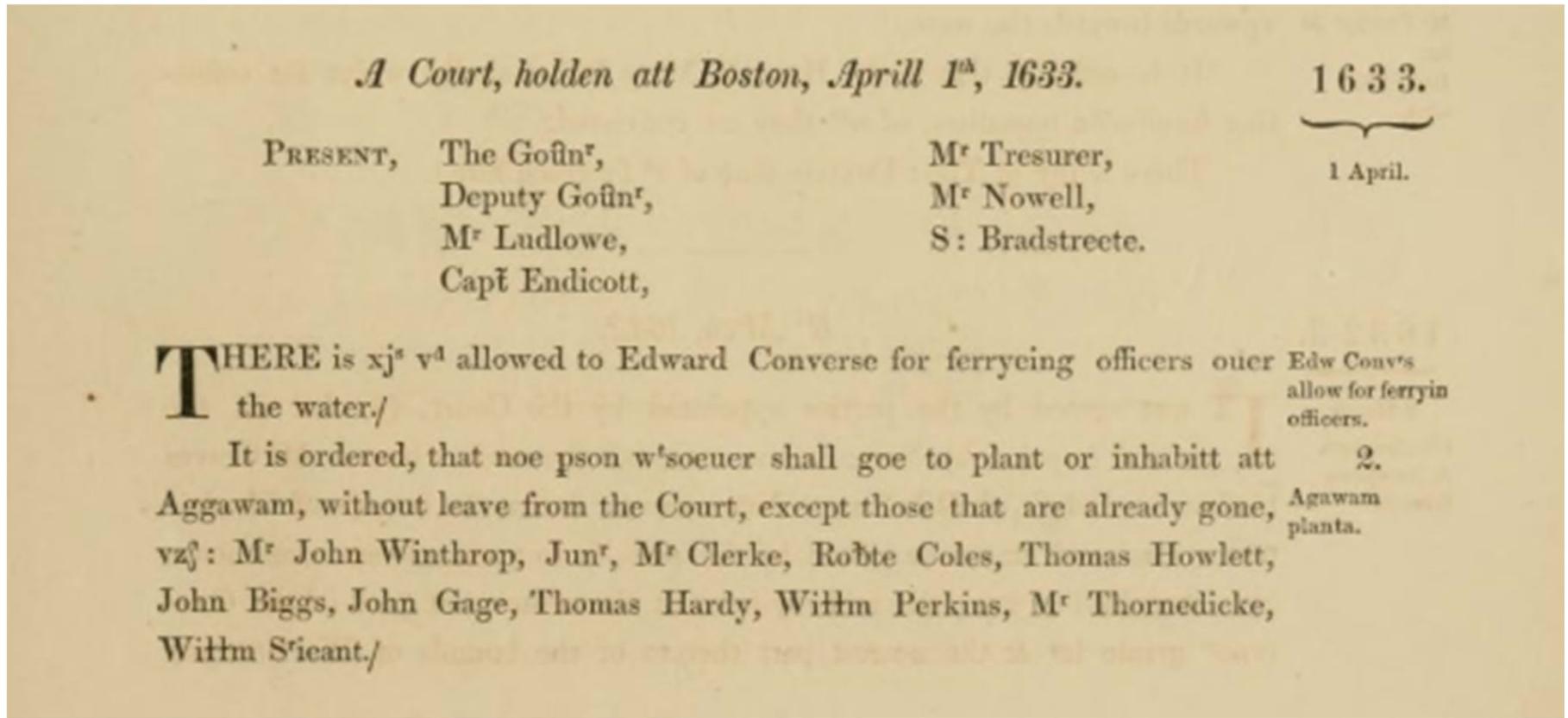
General Court of Mass Bay Company

- Governing body of Massachusetts Bay Colony
 - Governor, Lt. Governor
- Managed colony's affairs
 - Laws
 - Taxes
- Deputies elected from each community
- Left management of communities to proprietors

Proprietors

- Wealthy
- Responsible for infrastructure
- Recruited new settlers
- Distributed home lots
- Had interest in undivided lands
 - Future revenue

Ipswich



*Records of the Governor and Co. of the
Massachusetts Bay In New England*

Land Grants

- Proprietors' Records
- Town Records
- Varying parcel sizes
 - Social standing

Land lyeinge near the River, on the south side thereof.
Given and Granted unto John Winthropp, Esq., three hundred acres of Land lyeinge att the head of a River or Cricke known by the name (Labour in vane) unto him his heirs or assigns forever.

Given and Granted unto Mr. William Clerke, sixty acres of Land, lyeinge Eastward of (Labour in vane) Southward by the Town River, sepatated from all other Lands by a small Cricke incompassing the same, unto him his heirs or assigns forever.

Given and Granted unto Mr. Robert Coles two hundred acres of Land more or less, lyeinge uppon this neck of Land the Town standeth, bounded by a Cricke on the North side, and a Cricke on the West side, and this Town River on the South side, unto him his heirs or assigns forever.

Given and Granted unto John Perkins the Elder, fouretye acres of Land, more or less, bounded on the East by Mr. Rob' Coles his Land on the South by a small Cricke, on the West unto the towne side, unto him his heirs or assigns.

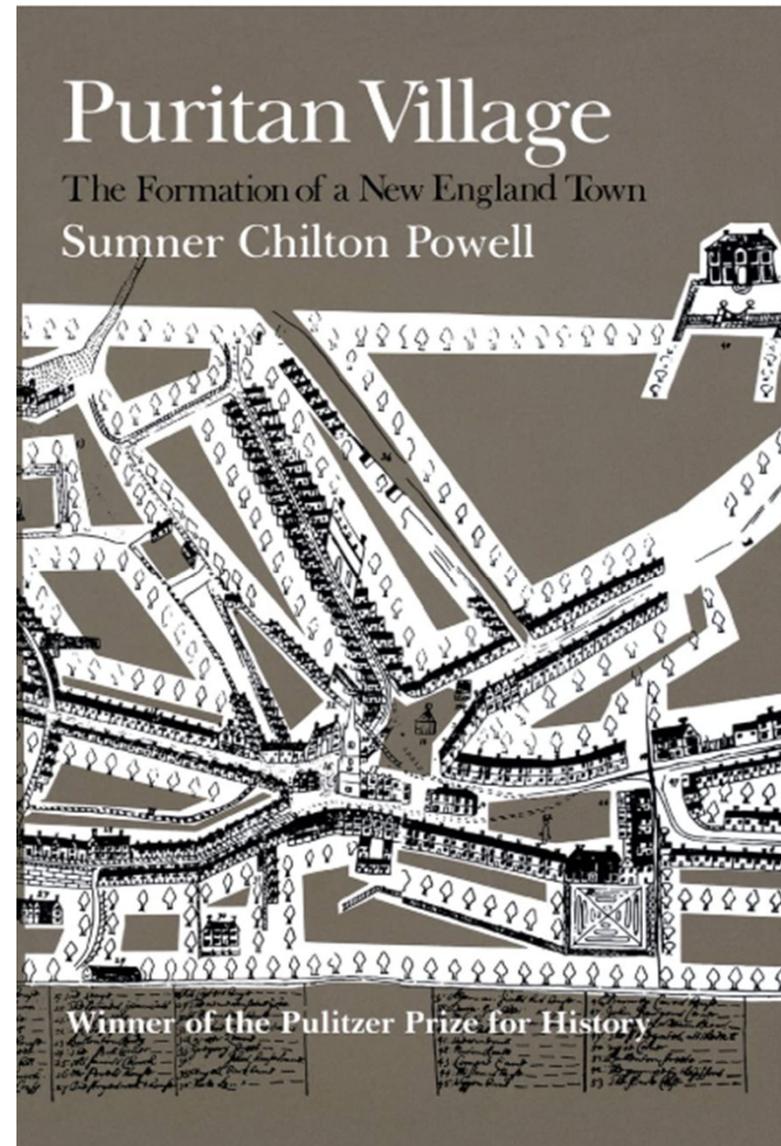
Given and Granted unto Mr. John Dillingham, Six acres of Land, lyeinge at the West end of the Town on the South side of the great Swamp, to him, his heirs o assigns.

Att a meetinge houlden on the [] 1634 all the grants formerly entered [] unto and Mr Willaim Clerke Ch [] or Clerke of the Towne to enter all [] and determinations of the Towne in this book and he to deliver copies of Lands granted as they shall be required.

That whosoever will have his lott entered into the records of the Towne, shall bring unto the Officer in that beehalf, a certificate under the hands of Henry Short, John Pirkins, Robert Mussey, John Gadge or the greatest pt of them wic shall bee a warrant unto the officer in that beehalf to enter and record the same,

That there shall noe farriner amongst us come into our meetinge unless he will subject himself unto the like orders and penalties that we the freemen of the Towne, have established for our own peace and comfort in our meetinge.

- Sudbury, Massachusetts
- Chronicles founding by settlers of Watertown
 - Division of lands
 - Management
 - Discord
- Best source



Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town

Freemen

- A man who was granted full civil and political rights
 - Vote in elections
 - Hold office
- Legal resident
- Qualifications depended by time and place
 - Member of church
 - Property owner

FREEMAN'S OATH

I, A. B., being by the Almighty's most wise disposition become a member of this body consisting of the Governor, Deputy Governor, Assistants and Commonalty of the Massachusetts in New England, do freely and sincerely acknowledge that I am justly and lawfully subject to the Government of the same, and do accordingly submit my person and estate to be protected, ordered and governed by the laws and constitutions thereof, and do faithfully promise to be from time to time obedient and conformable thereunto, and to the authority of the said Governor and Assistants, and their successors, and to all such laws, orders, sentences and decrees as shall be lawfully made and published by them or their successors. And I will always endeavor (as in duty I am bound) to advance the peace and welfare of this body or commonwealth, to my utmost skill and ability. And I will, to my best power and means, seek to divert and prevent whatsoever may tend to the ruin or damage thereof, or of any the said Governor, Deputy Governor, or Assistants, or any of them, or their successors, and will give speedy notice to them, or some of them, of any sedition, violence, treachery, or other hurt or evil, which I shall know, hear, or vehemently suspect, to be plotted or intended against the said commonwealth, or the said Government established. And I will not, at any time, suffer or give consent to any counsel or attempt, that shall be offered, given, or attempted, for the impeachment of the said Government, or making any change or alteration of the same, contrary to the laws and ordinances thereof; but shall do my utmost endeavor to discover, oppose and hinder all and every such counsel and attempt. So help me God.

At the General Court held at Boston, May 14, 1634: It was agreed and ordered, that the former oath of freemen shall be revoked, so far as it is dissonant from the oath of freemen hereunder written; and that those that received the former oath shall stand bound no further thereby, to any intent or purpose, than this new oath ties those that now take the same.

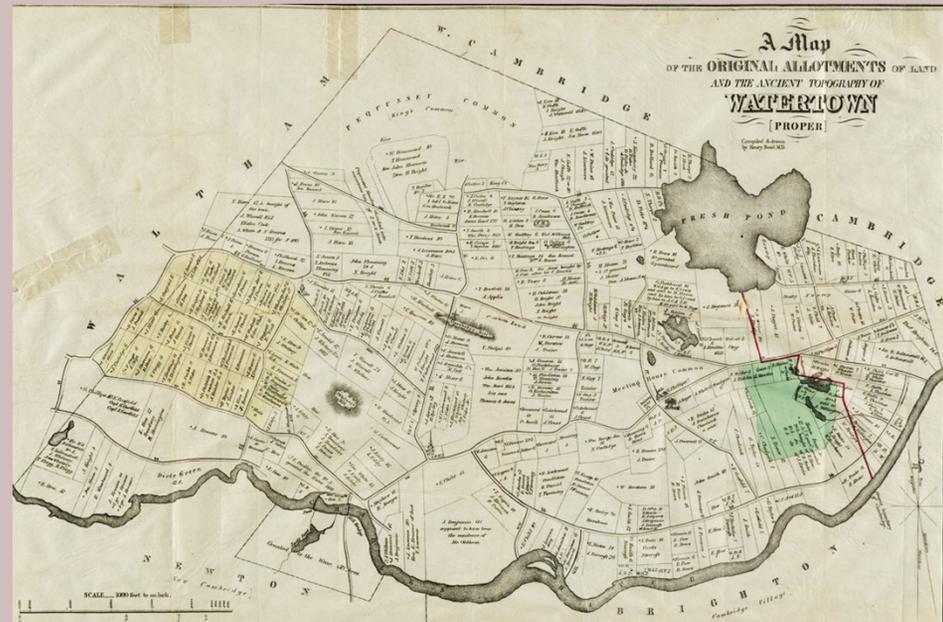
Massachusetts Bay Colony - 1634

Limited Settlement

- Settlement sometimes limited in proprietorships
 - Proprietors wanted to retain undivided common lands
 - Protect future revenue
- Process and timing differed by each proprietorship

How did settlers receive land?

- Land grant via Proprietors
- Purchase
- Inherited
 - Through probate

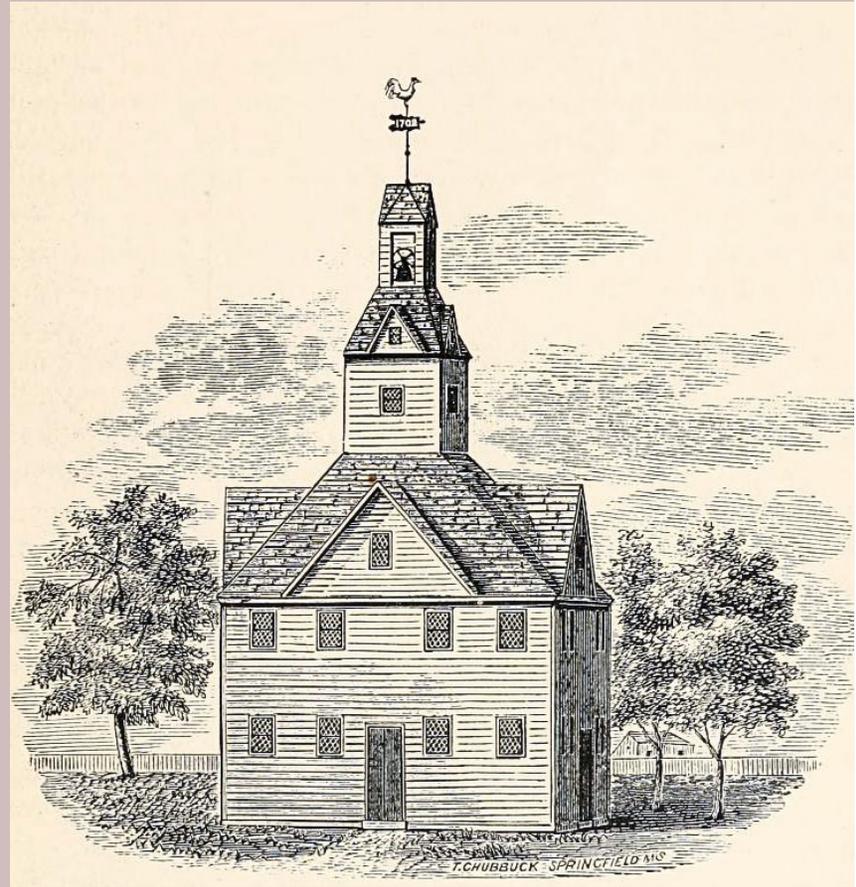


Appointment of Town Officers

- Elected at Town Meeting by Freemen
 - Yearly (Generally March or April)
- Town Clerk: Meeting minutes, births, marriages, deaths
- Selectmen: Managed affairs of the town
- Constables: Policemen; enforced laws
- Tithingmen: Paid tithes, attended church

Religion

- Religion epicenter of life
- Meetinghouse is center of community
 - Worship
 - Town business



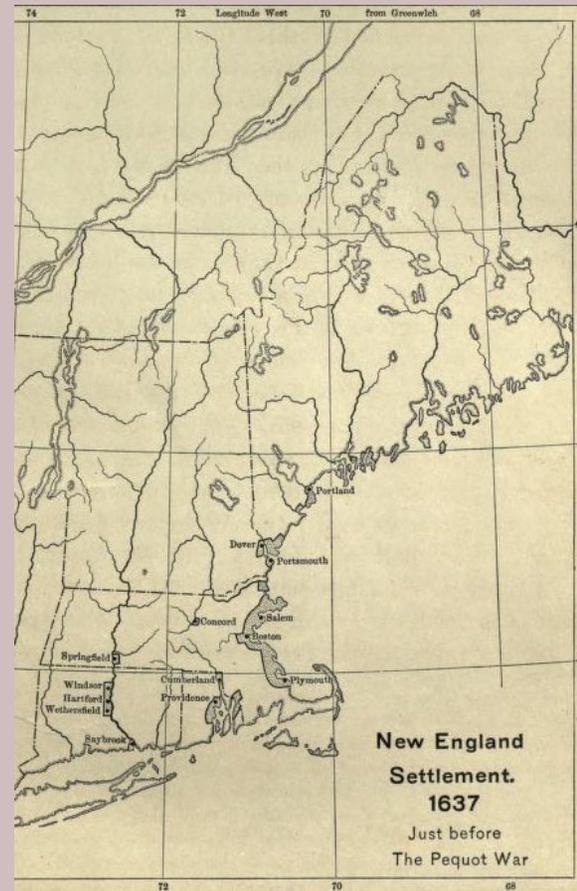
Everything is Local

- Town based government
 - Manages infrastructure
 - Organizes defenses
 - Collects taxes
- Tight knit communities
 - Intermarried families
 - Neighbors from former communities
- Wary of newcomers

Expansion and Migration

1620s-1660s

- Population expands with new immigrants
- Move towards the interior
- New settlements along rivers or coast
- Along Indigenous routes – The Great Trail



Reasons for Expansion

- Too crowded
- More land
 - Founders control land
- Discord
 - Religious
 - Political
- Economic opportunity
 - Trade

Expansion

- 1634 - Wethersfield
- 1635 – Concord
- 1635 – Windsor
- 1636 – Hartford
- 1636 - Springfield



Connecticut

- Military exploits during Pequot War allow for exploration of area
 - Discover fertile soil and abundant natural resources
- Connecticut River vehicle for trade and transport
- Expansion continues
 - Increases rapidly after 1640s

Rhode Island

- Roger Williams and associates from Salem settle Providence in 1636
 - Purchased land from Narragansett Tribe
- Other dissenters follow and establish communities
- Slow growth
- Royal Charter granted in 1663

New Hampshire

- Coastal
- Rye settled in 1635
- Reverend John Wheelwright and his followers found Exeter in 1638
- Others migrate from Essex County, Massachusetts
- Slow growth

Maine

- A trading post at modern day Augusta on the Kennebec River established by Plymouth Colony in 1628
 - Other posts established along coast
- Coastal
- Frontier settlements/outposts
- Slow growth

Chain Migration

- Process of following a person to a new location
 - Family follows family to new communities
 - Neighbor follows neighbor to new communities



How can I trace my ancestor?

- Who founded the community?
- Cluster research
- FAN Club
 - Family
 - Associates
 - Neighbors
- Learn about your ancestor through their connections

Important Questions

1. Who do they buy land from or sell land to?
2. Who is their neighbor?
3. Where are their neighbors from?
4. Do they serve as an administrator or an executor of someone's estate?
 - Suggests close relationship

Creating a Research Plan for Cluster Research

Lindsay Fulton, Director of Research Services
May 21, 2020



American Ancestors
by NEW ENGLAND HISTORIC GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY

▶ ⏪ 🔊 0:02 / 1:15:49 • Intro >



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFA_IfMsThg

QUESTIONS?

1670s-1710s

- Continued immigration
- Frontier boundaries pushed west
 - Migration out of New England (New Haven Colony: Long Island, New Jersey)
- Wars with Indigenous Peoples
 - Destruction of frontier settlements
- Slow rebuild

King Philip's War 1675-6

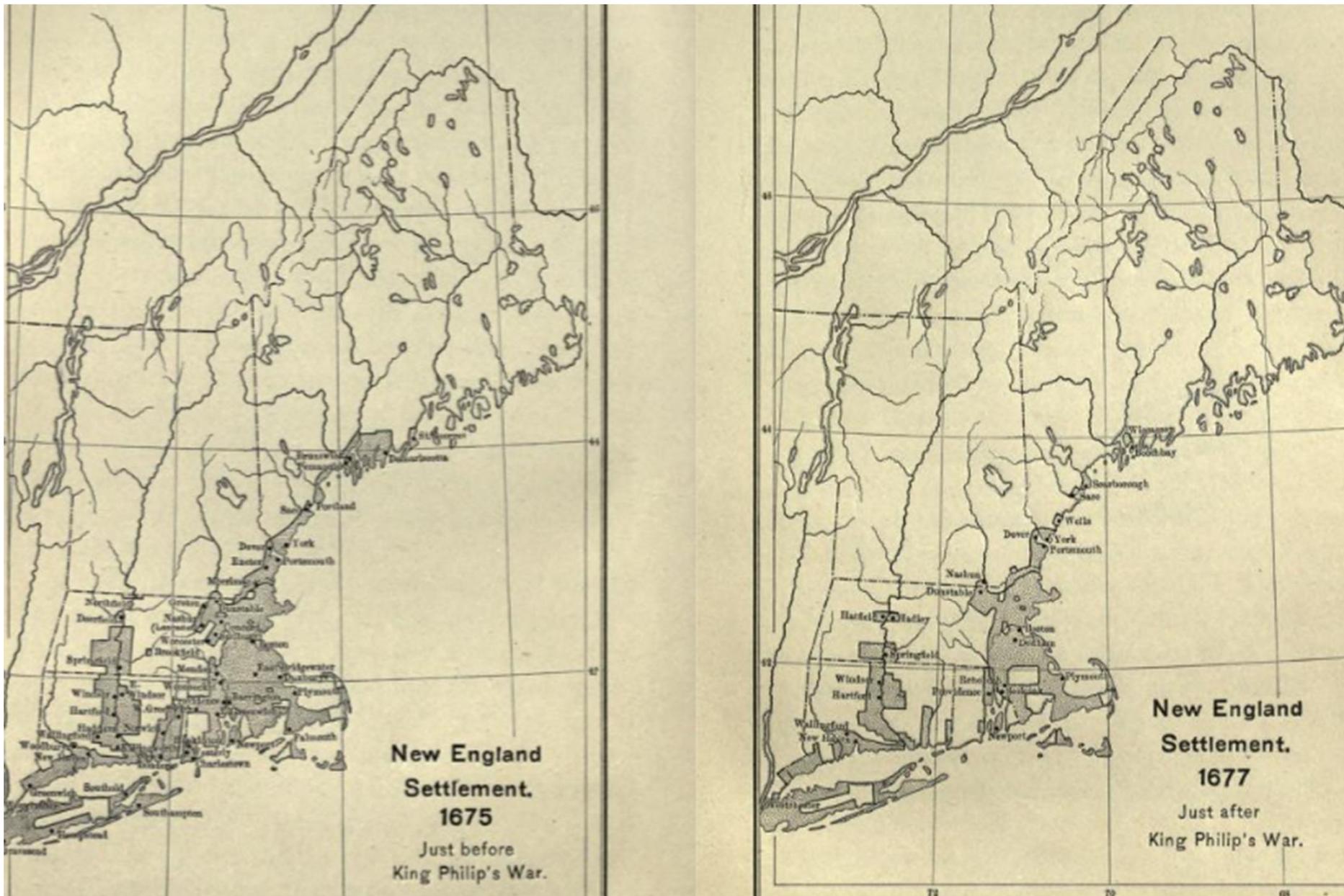
- Death of Massasoit in 1661 leads to breakdown in peace
- Colonists continue to settle on land of Indigenous Peoples
 - Diminish natural resources
 - Encroachment
- Continue to convert Indigenous Peoples to Christianity

King Philip's War 1675-6

- Metacomet becomes chief of Wampanoag Confederacy in 1662
 - Also known as King Philip
- Continued breakdown in diplomacy
 - Tension
 - Alliance of Tribes
- Murder of John Sassamon

King Philip's War 1675-6

- Attack on Swansea in June 1675
- Battles throughout New England
- Destruction of settlements
 - Colonists flee
- Thousands of colonists and Indigenous Peoples die



Aftermath

- Southern New England colonists migrate east or to coastal settlements
- Northern New England settlers flee to the south
 - Maine frontier essentially abandoned
- After war, many towns repopulate and rebuild
- Slow resettlement in frontier
 - Maine

More Conflict

- King William's War (1689-1697)
- Queen Anne's War (1701-1713)
- Continued tension between colonists of New France, New England, and Indigenous Peoples
- Destruction of frontier settlements
 - Refugees

1720s-1770s

- Population of New England increases greatly
 - Natural increase
 - Immigration
- Settlement pushes north and west
- Large growth in population of Northern New England
 - After French and Indian War
 - 1760s and 1770s

Medfield. Noumber y^e 6.th 1729: att the House of m^r Joshua Morse. The Associates of William Ward & Joshua Morse — proprietors Grantees of a Tract of Land Lying Between Oxford Brookfield Brimfield and the prouincial Line. Granted by the great and Generall Court of this prouince 1729: Being assembled and mett pursuant to a Notification giuen under the hand of William Ward who was Authorised and Impowred by the afores^d Generall Court To assemble the afores^d Grantees and to act as Moderator in said Meeting. By Vertue of which Notification itt appeared under y^e Hands of said William Ward — And Joshua Morse That they had Notified y^e said Associates and Grantees — To meett at the Time & place Afore mentioned. —

the: Said Associates Grantees being Mett at the Time and place as Afore said — A list of their Names was Read to the Number of Forty Two: as followeth

Melatiak Bourn: Esq.	Joseph Baker	Abraham Harding	Cap ^t John Dwight
William Ward: Esq.	Jonas Houghton	Moses Harding	Cap ^t Jon ^s Boyden
Ezra Bourn	Thomas Gleson	Josiah Ellice	Cap ^t Joseph Clark
Shuball Goram	Moses Gleson	Peter Balch	Nathan ^l Morse
Thomas Learned	Jonas Gleson	Ezra Clark	James Danison
Nathan Fisk	Joshua Morse	Samuell Ellier	Joseph Mash
Henry Fisk	Joseph Plimpton	David Ellier	
Cap ^t Ebenezer Learned	Nathanell Smith	Francis Moquott	
Nahum Ward	Solomon Clark	Henry Adams	
Gorsham Keyes	Timothy Hamment	Jehabod Harding	
Zerubbath Eager	William Plimpton	John Plimpton	
John Shoarman	Ephraim Partridge	Josiah Raney	

Sturbridge, Mass Town Records

Northern New England

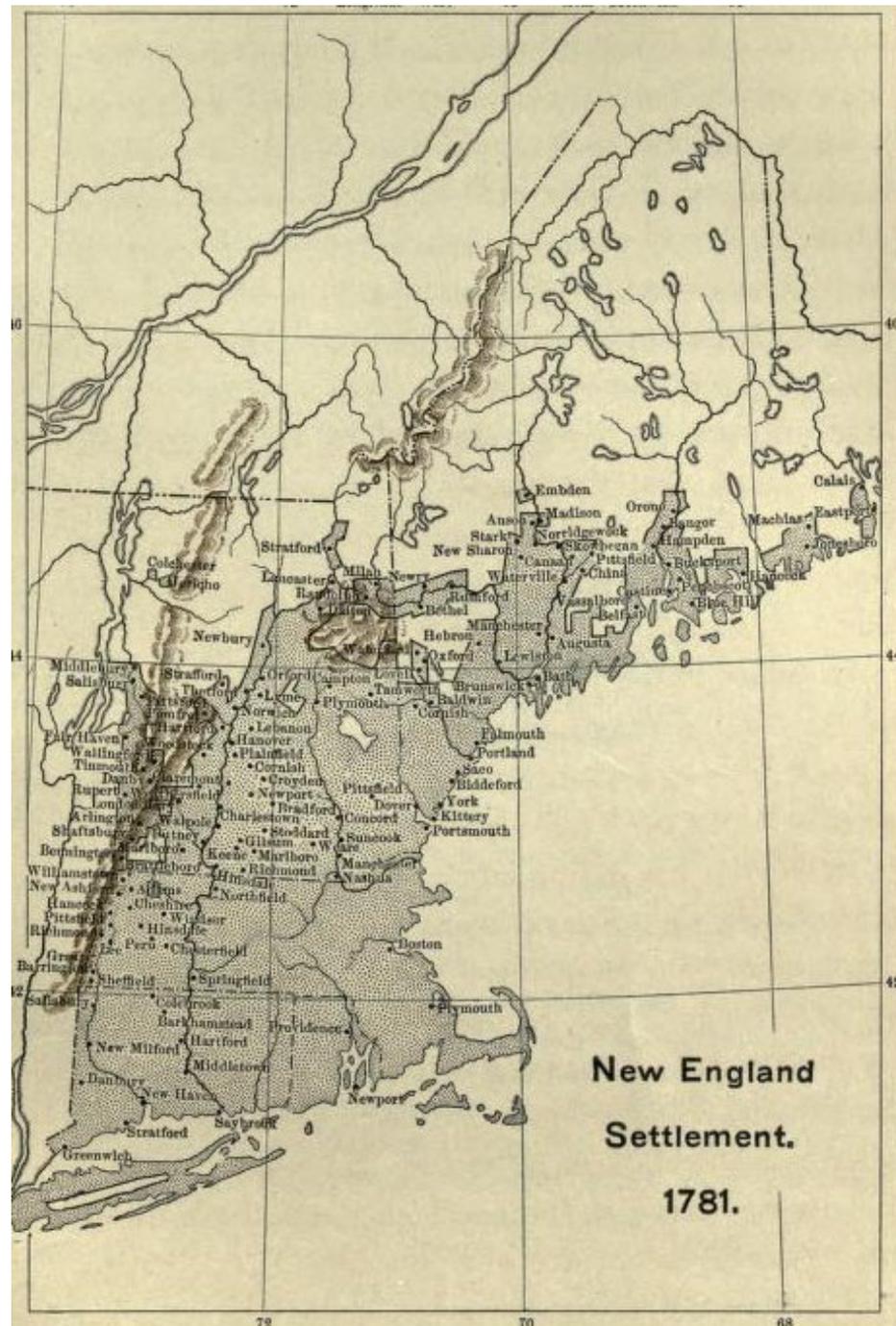
- Fighting during French and Indian War largely ceases in colonies in 1760
 - Britain gains control of French Canada
- Settlers less fearful
- Large number of towns founded in New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont

After French and Indian War

- Empty lands in Connecticut and Massachusetts populated
 - Worcester County
 - Western Massachusetts
- Settlers look north
 - Fertile lands along Connecticut River

New Hampshire and Vermont

- 1761 – Sixty Townships granted on both sides of Connecticut River
 - Settlers required to plant and cultivate their five acres within a term of five years
- Governor Wentworth reserved 500 acres in each township



Themes

- Reasons for migration
 - Land
 - Economic opportunity
 - Discord
 - Chain Migration
- Migration and expansion halted by conflicts and violence
- Settlers migrate with family and neighbors
 - Establish new communities together

QUESTIONS?

Schedule a consultation

consultations@americanancestors.org

Hire Research Services

research@americanancestors.org

Consultations

Book a one-on-one
consultation with
a genealogist and
receive help with your
family history research!

[AmericanAncestors.org/
Expert-Help/Consultations](https://AmericanAncestors.org/Expert-Help/Consultations)



Revolutionary War Research: Tracing Patriot and Loyalist Ancestors 2025

Thank you for registering for the online seminar, *Revolutionary War Research: Tracing Patriot and Loyalist Ancestors*!

Nearly 250 years ago, America declared its independence from the British Empire, changing the course of history. For those of us with ancestry in the American colonies from that period, we want to know if our ancestor served the cause—and on what side. This five-week online course will delve into the many primary and published records that exist to document your ancestors' role in the American Revolution, be it as a Patriot or a Loyalist.

This course includes five 90-minute classes and exclusive access to handouts and recordings of each presentation. These recordings and all course materials will be available for the foreseeable future.

JOIN THE LIVE BROADCAST

Click here to join the live sessions: <https://zoom.us/j/92667481149>

Wednesdays, April 2, 9, 16, 23, and 30, 6:00 – 7:30 PM

If you are unable to attend the live session, you will be able to view a recording on this webpage.

CLASS TOPICS

April 2 – Class 1: Getting to Know Your Revolutionary War Ancestor, Sheilagh Doerfler

This first class will provide a brief, historical overview of the American Patriots and those who remained loyal to the British Crown, offering definitions of key terms, statistics, demographics, motives, and the general movement of people during and after the war. We'll also look at how muster rolls, manuscript materials, published histories, lineage society databases, and more can help you establish your ancestor's service and explore their role in the American

<https://www.americanancestors.org/revolutionary-war-research-tracing-patriot-and-loyalist-ancestors-2025>



THANK YOU!

AmericanAncestors.org/Education



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