

*State Papers Division -
Secretary of State*

A SUMMARY OF VERMONT LOTTING

No hard and fast definitions can be given with regard to the lotting systems used in Vermont because of the many variations that exist. However, it is hoped that the following general outline will help the uninitiated to understand the basic procedure by which a township was granted, and some of the more common methods used to divide the land within the township between the grantees.

No two town lot plans in Vermont are precisely alike. The lotting methods varied, with at least seven broad categories. The town boundaries as well, with the many gaps (known as gores) between adjoining towns, evidence early problems. Still other towns overlapped, causing great consternation for the owners of that land; witness the Salisbury Leicester dispute to name only one. Thus the following discourse must be considered as a rough guide only.

At first the land in Vermont, or the New Hampshire Grants as it was then called, was bought mainly for investment purposes by land speculators living in the colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire. Most of these men, the original proprietors of the townships, had no intention of settling on the property they bought; usually they never even saw their land, and we can only assume that they realized a profit when they sold it.

Let us start with a typical New Hampshire grant, since they are the most numerous, and follow the course of action for a specimen town. To begin with, sixty or seventy petitioners would present Governor Benning Wentworth with a petition asking for a grant of land, and this, together with the payment of the granting fees, placated "GEORGE THE THIRD, By the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, KING, Defender of the Faith, &c." as well as aiding and abetting Benning Wentworth and his minions. More of Wentworth's activities may be read about in Matt B. Jones' Vermont in the Making.

Once the petitioners' prayer was granted, and the fees were paid, the next step was to divide the land between the petitioners by the drawing of lots. In towns where there were divisions (illustration A) there was a hat labelled for each division, e.g., 1st, 2nd, 3rd, etc., and each proprietor drew one lot from each division hat. These were recorded by the proprietors' clerk. It was not uncommon to do the actual surveying of the land after this paper division. Some towns had a lot and range system (illustration B); the range numbers were along one side of the town and the lot numbers along the other. The lot draught was performed the same way, with the hats labelled for the ranges.

The divisions usually were based on the quality of the land, in relation to agricultural pursuits. Thus, the first division commonly was the best

agrarian soil, the second division less arable, third division still less so, etc.* In addition, many towns had undivided or "pitch" land, and a number of methods evolved to allow occupancy and title to this. The most common was to find an existing bound, usually a tree blazed for a corner, a stone cairn or a post at the edge of the undivided land, and using this as a starting point, survey a parcel of the pitch land for recording at the town clerk's office. The person surveying, claiming, "improving" (which usually meant de-forestation to prepare the land for farming), recording the pitch and paying the taxes on it became its owner, comparable to homesteading (see illustration C).

The New Hampshire charters consisted of a preamble praising King George and Governor Benning Wentworth, a body describing the physical boundaries of the town, and finally, stipulations regarding terms of settlement, cultural improvements and taxes. They also set aside a lot for Benning Wentworth (usually 500 acres, more rarely 800 acres) and one lot each for the first settled minister, the town schools, the county grammar school, the college, the Church of England and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.^o

It is important to remember that the early proprietors were rarely the first settlers. There was often a twenty year lapse between the granting of a township and its actual settlement. If the proprietors did not sell their land, and were unable to pay the taxes on it, it was eventually sold at a vendue, or tax sale. The buyers at the vendues might be potential settlers or other speculators, and the land might pass through several hands before being bought by an individual who intended to settle on it.

The purpose of this paper is to make the reader/researcher aware (1) that there were numerous methods of lotting; (2) that the original settlers were not necessarily the same as the original proprietors and (3) to pique the interest in further study of Vermont lotting history.

SUGGESTED READING

Bogart, Walter T., The Vermont Lease Lands, Vt. Historical Society, (Montpelier, 1950).

Jones, Matt B., Vermont In The Making, Archon Press (Cambridge, 1939).

Woodard, Florence May, The Town Proprietors in Vermont, Columbia University Press (New York, 1936).

The New Hampshire State Papers, Vol. XXVI, (Concord, 1895).

The State Papers of Vermont, Vols. II, V, (Bellows Falls, 1922; Brattleboro, 1939).

(* and ^o - For these "addenda" footnotes, see Page 3)

Prepared by-

M. Merton Burns
Assistant Editor of State Papers
114757

Addenda by Robert L. Hagerman, Assistant Editor of State Papers, 1982

*Some towns also had divisions of certain lands which had some special quality or value. Two examples are: (1) the shore line of a major river (notably the Connecticut River) or of a large body of water (see town of Westmore for Lake Willoughby and possibly one or more Lake Champlain towns); and (2) an exceptionally fine stand of timber trees (see Hyde Park and Montpelier).

°These are the so-called "public rights" lots, which for some years have been generally referred to as "leaselands" (this is a very complex land phenomenon). The "owner" of such a lot was in fact (and technically still is) a leaseholder, his "rental payments" going to the particular beneficiary of his leaseland lot. Town charters issued by the State of Vermont (following its declaration of independence in 1777) also generally required the establishment of certain public rights lots.

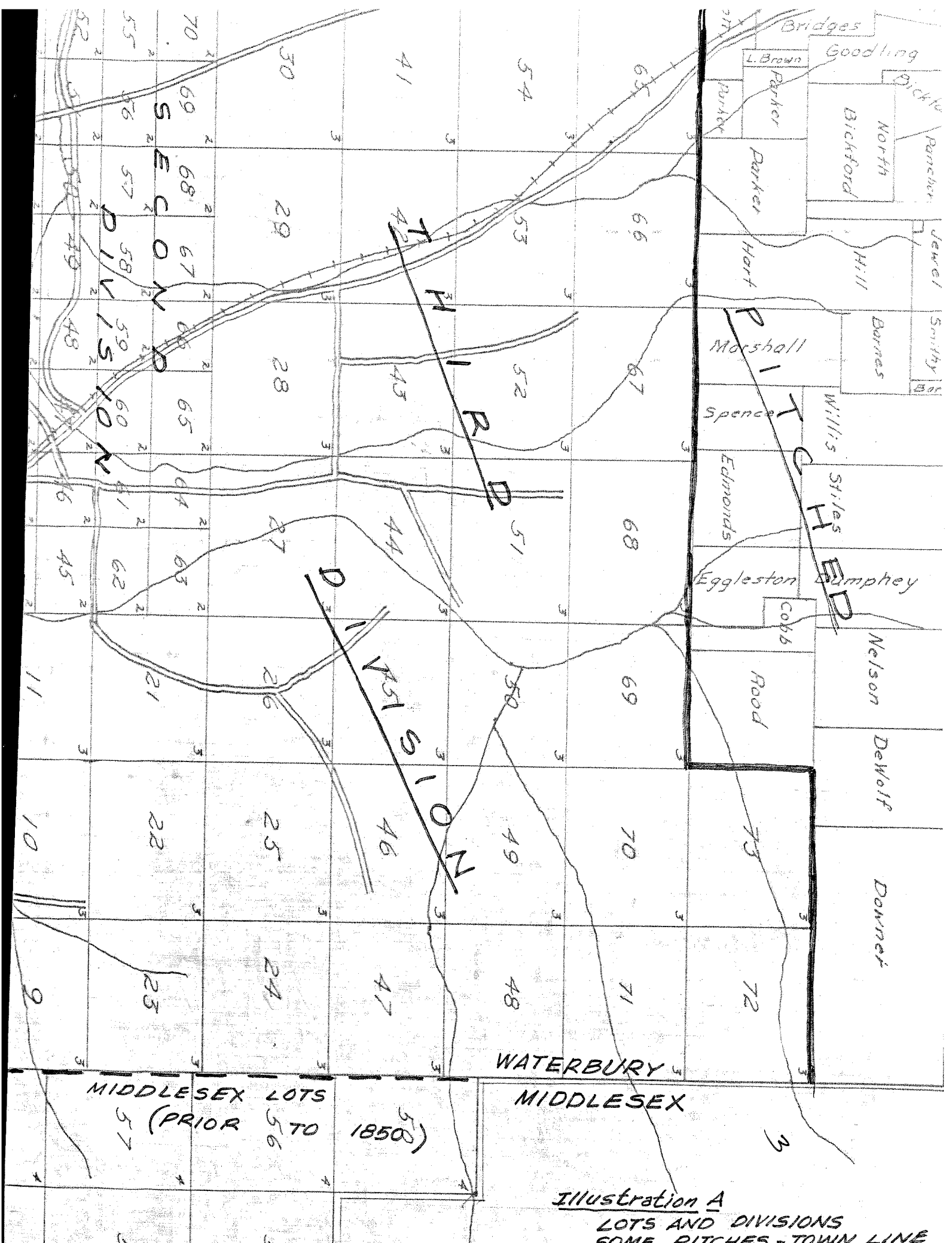


Illustration A
 LOTS AND DIVISIONS
 SOME DITCHES - TOWN LINE

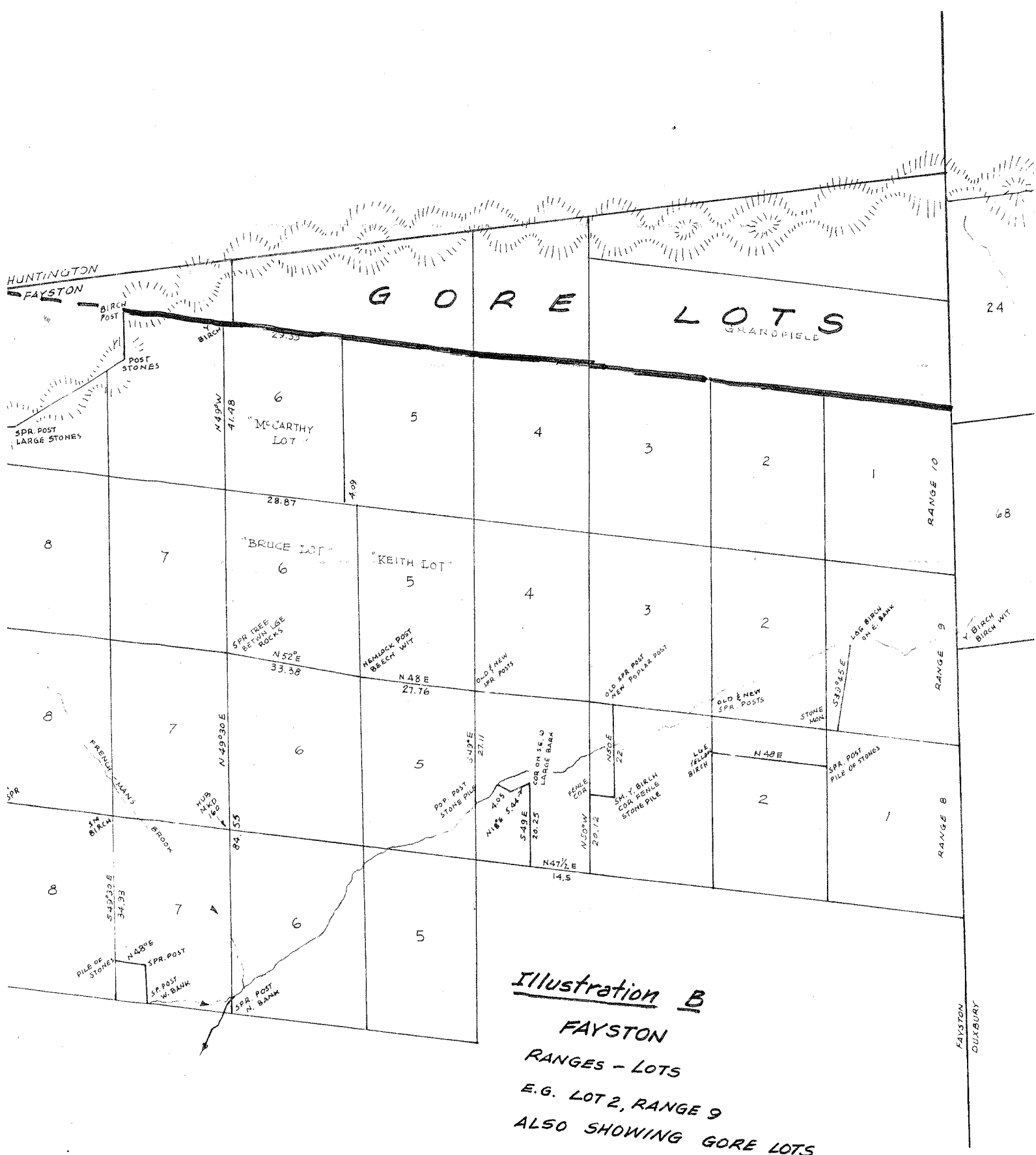


Illustration B
 FAYSTON
 RANGES - LOTS
 E.G. LOT 2, RANGE 9
 ALSO SHOWING GORE LOTS

