

HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF WOODFORD

THIS town was chartered by Governor Wentworth on the 6th of March, 1753; therefore with the exception of the towns of Bennington and Stamford it is the oldest of those that form the county, but Stamford was not granted prior to Woodford but at the same time. It was the intention of the worthy governor of the province to make no township of greater than thirty-six square miles, but for some reason Woodford was made an exception, it containing no less than forty-two square miles of land, and being six miles in north and south measurement and seven miles east and west.

Woodford ranks with the more mountainous towns of the county, being situate almost wholly within the main range of the Green Mountain chain. Its boundaries are as follows:- North by Glastenbury, south by Stamford and Pownal, east by Searsburg and Readsboro, and west by Bennington. The town, from its very mountainous character, is possessed of an abundant water-power; its hills are, or have been, covered with a heavy growth of excellent timber, spruce, hemlock, and other kinds. Thus, while the town can lay no claim to possessing remarkable agricultural advantages, it can, however, boast of its lumber producing interests, and this has been the mainstay and support of her population. But Woodford is not without good farming lands, some in the "hollow" and others on the mountain, still the town is not particularly well adapted to farming pursuits, and the people do not aim to make it such.

Although Woodford was chartered in 1753, settlement did not actually commence until some twenty-five years later, and the town organization was not effected earlier than February, 1789. The first settlers were Caleb MOORE, Matthew and Zarah SCOTT, and Benjamin REED. At a town meeting held March 10, 1792 there were present and took the freemen's oath, Joseph WILSON, Caleb MOORE, Obediah EDDY, Zadock PIERCE, Eli PIERCE, Hezekiah PIERCE, and Benjamin ORCUTT. The oldest town records appear to be lost or worn out and destroyed, but in the back part of one of the old deed books are to be found the proceedings of the

freemen's meetings as far back as 1797. In that year at a meeting held in March, Elkhanah DANFORTH was chosen town clerk; William DANFORTH, Paul PHILLIPS, and William PARKS, selectmen; Elijah PHELPS, collector; Jonathan DANFORTH, constable; Matthew SCOTT, treasurer; William PARK, Matthew SCOTT, and Obediah EDDY, listers. At this meeting also it was voted to raise the sum of twelve dollars for town expenses. At a meeting held at Robert HILL's house, in December, 1798, there were present, William PARK, Ebenezer PEASE, Robert HILL, Obediah EDDY, Samuel STACY, Benjamin REED, Paul PHILLIPS, Isaac COBBE, Elkhanah DANFORTH, Jonathan DANFORTH, and Lemuel MARTIN. In 1799 the selectmen were Elkhanah DANFORTH, William PARK, and Paul PHILLIPS; the treasurer, Obediah EDDY; listers, William PARK, Jonathan DANFORTH, and Eleazer PHILLIPS; constable and collector, Jonathan DANFORTH; surveyors of highways, Paul PHILLIPS and William PARK. At the meeting for the election of State officers, held in 1800, these freemen were present: Elkhanah DANFORTH, Jonathan DANFORTH, Isaac KIBBE, Samuel ORCUTT, Robert HILL, Lemuel MARTIN, Paul PHILLIPS, Oliver PERRY, William DANFORTH, Obediah EDDY, Eli Pierce, John OLIVER, Spencer LYON, Jabez KNAPP, John PHELPS, Samuel STACY, Alhanan PERRY, Hezakiah and Jonathan FERGUSON.

During these early days, as well as at a later period, there was kept with the clerk a record of marriages, births, and deaths in each town.. The first child born in Woodford is said to have been Benjamin REED, jr., the son of Benjamin and Huldah REED, pioneers of the town. This first event occurred August 11, 1779. The record books of that period are now missing from the clerk's office, and the first that is to be had is of a later period. It appears that on the 24th of September, 1802, Obediah EDDY and Fanny LYON were united in marriage; and, on the 4th of February, 1803 that James EDDY and Sally FERGUSON were married; also, a further entry says that Jabez KNAPP and Bethiah KNAPP, "having been lawfully published, were joined in marriage by mee, Elkhanah DANFORTH, justice of the peace and town clerk "

The town of Woodford cannot be said to have made much of any history, in fact none at all, during the period of the controversy with New York, the War of the Revolution, and the subsequent proceedings which preceded the admission of Vermont to the Union; but its history really commenced with the town organization, which event occurred in 1789 as has been already narrated. At that time there were some ten or twelve families in the township and the names of most of them have been given. The leaders seem to have been William PARK and Elkhanah DANFORTH, while Robert HILL, Paul PHILLIPS, and Obediah EDDY were lesser lights, yet quite prominent.

William PARK, undoubtedly the then influential man of the town, seems to have been a surveyor, as well as pioneer, farmer, and lumberman. He became the owner of very large tracts of land in the town, and was considered a man of excellent judgment and business abilities. He held nearly all the responsible offices of the town, and was clerk for some thirty years. Elkhanah DANFORTH was equally prominent with Mr. PARK, likewise a continuous officeholder in leading positions. As justice of the peace, an office the incumbency of which then implied a thorough knowledge of the law, he was quite a dignitary in the community, and one whose counsel was much sought. His handwriting in the old record books would seem to entitle it to be ranked with Horace Greeley's, for it is almost impossible to decipher it. Obediah EDDY was the first representative elected in the township, but Obediah obstinately refused to have this honor thrust upon him and would not serve, whereupon the meeting adjourned without voting for State officers. Such cases as this have been few, and it is believed that the town has not been similarly embarrassed since that time, at least not during late years. But Obediah EDDY was a prominent man in the town, and one whose influence and counsel were of weight in town affairs.

The town of Woodford, from its situation and physical features, was quite difficult of settlement, or if settlement was effected improvement and cultivation were still more laborious. The exceedingly mountainous and rocky character of the land obliged the residents to turn their attention to something else

than farming, and as the region had an abundance of fine growing timber this became a lumber producing rather than an agricultural township; and so it has remained to this day, only enough farm products being raised to supply the needs of the inhabitants, and this to a limited extent. Manufacturing commenced in Woodford about the beginning of the present century, and in that part of the town that has ever been known as the "Hollow," that being a ravine of some miles in length, through which courses the stream called Bolles Brook. This pioneer industry was a forge for the manufacture of bar iron, and soon after became a furnace for making anchors for vessels. At a considerably later day another bar iron forge was built, which outlived the others by many years, but neither of these industries are now in operation. Another of the prominent industries, though it may not have been an ancient one, was the production of yellow ochre, a fine clay found in various places along the hollow, much used in mechanical arts. There were two paint-mills in operation here at one time, the ochre being a prominent factor in this manufacture, but this too, is now at an end in this locality.

The chief products to day, that in fact has been for the last half century or more, is the manufacture of lumber in various forms, and the production of charcoal. These have been carried on to a very great extent, but the supply of raw material now shows visible signs of exhaustion. For fifty and more years the incessant attacks of the woodman have told seriously upon the native forests of Woodford, and if continued for a like time in the future their utter devastation will be the result. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to name each and every lumber and charcoal producer that has operated in this town. Many are still here that have worked for years, and others have come and gone of whom there is left no record.

That part of the town that has always been called the "Hollow," by people generally, has an advantage over the southern portion by its proximity to the railroad that runs from Bennington to Glastenbury, for the manufactures of this locality can be loaded on the cars with but little team work, and are therefore sent to market at less expense than the products of Woodford City and

the region further south. The construction of this road gave to the denizens of the "Hollow" a dignity not previously theirs, and resulted in a change of name, at least, among the residents there, of the locality from the "Hollow" to "Slab City," by which it was known for some time. Then by a subsequent change, brought about by the extensive industries operated by the HARBOUR Brothers, the place became known as Harbourville. But the reader who is not acquainted with this immediate locality must not for a moment imagine that Harbourville, formerly Slab City, formerly Woodford Hollow, is a snug little hamlet on Bolles Brook, for such is hardly the case. The "Hollow" begins as one enters the defile between the mountains and ends where the ravine becomes lost in the mountains, a distance of two or more miles. The place now called Harbourville, proper, consists of the mills operated by the firm of HARBOUR Brothers and the few houses erected for the accommodation of proprietors and employees. This is about all there is of the place, still there are some other industries in the "Hollow."

The most extensive manufacturers in the north part of the town are the members of the firm of HARBOUR Brothers, already frequently mentioned, who have been operating in the vicinity for a number of years. They are large landowners and employ a number of men in their business. They have been producers of lumber and charcoal, but the former, in various forms, now mainly occupies their attention, their products including "bill stuff," lath and shingles. Harbourville with HARBOUR Brothers left out would be hardly discernible.

Above the "Hollow" there was built and put in operation in 1864 a saw and turning-mill, the property of Lyman PATCHIN, but after some years this passed to the firm of ALDRICH & MALLORY, who continued it. Of late, however, these proprietors have changed the machinery and re-arranged the building for use as a chair factory. In the lower part of the "Hollow" is the lumber, box and lath-mills of Lyman EVANS and Irving E. GIBSON, who do business here under the firm name of EVANS & GIBSON. The principal charcoal industries in this part of the town are those of J. J. MOREHOUSE and E. C. WHITE, (MOREHOUSE & WHITE),

both residents of New York, and Irving E. GIBSON's, formerly James BECKLEY's, who has some seven or eight kilns scattered about, and possibly other producers of less note.

There was a time when Woodford Hollow, throughout its entire length, was an exceeding busy community, but that time has long since passed. The old hotels that were built for the accommodation of travelers and to boarders in this vicinity, have long since lost their usefulness, and only during the fishing season does the stranger venture to remain long within the confines of the old "Hollow." The other and the principal manufacturing point of the township is the hamlet known for at least three score of years by the name of "Woodford City." It is said that "a city set on a hill shall not be hid;" therefore here must be a city, for it is on one of the highest elevations upon which a town could possibly be built up in the township, unless, perhaps, the extreme heights of Mount Prospect were used for that purpose. In all the long years of its existence Woodford City has acquired a population varying from one to two hundred persons. Like the proverbial Irishman's pig "it is little but old." But, notwithstanding the isolated situation of Woodford City, and the difficulty with which its high elevation is reached, the place abounds in beautiful scenes that attract many visitors; in fact of late it has become quite a resort, and it only remains for some enterprising person to build the proper style of summer hotel and advertise judiciously to make Woodford City the rival of the other resorts so numerous in the mountains of Vermont. Among the many natural attractions here is the body of water called Big Pond, something like one hundred acres in extent; to the southwest there rises high above the plateau lands Mount Prospect. Here, too, is found excellent trout fishing in the waters of Stamford stream, City stream and Rake branch. The whole locality abounds in delightful scenes and situations to attract the presence of summer boarders.

Woodford City, although never regularly laid out, and having no corporate existence apart from the balance of the township, is a busy little hamlet, having a population of forty or fifty families, all of whom are in some manner connected with the lumber and other industries for which the place is noted. The first settler on

this site is said to have been Zurial CUTLER, but prior to his coming a saw-mill was in operation at the place. Soon after CUTLER's settlement here William PARK and his son and Henry LOVELAND moved to the locality and then the city got its start. These families were at the city prior to 1820. The dense forest growth promised good returns of lumber and charcoal, and in this these and subsequent comers engaged, until the business spread over the entire central and southern portions of the township. The numerous mountain streams afforded capital power, and soon mills lined their banks at convenient points, while a multitude of charcoal kilns were scattered through the forests.

These industries have used, perhaps, the greater part of the forests, but still there remains a good quantity for the future. Where no longer than twenty years ago there was nothing but woods, may now be seen good farming lands, but this pursuit has never been considered profitable in this locality. Among the scores of industries that have at one time or another been in operation at the city but comparatively few remain, and as the decline has been here so has it been generally throughout the township, owing in great measure to the exhaustion of the supply of raw material. The present industries of the city are about as follows: F. A. GLEASON, manufacturer of lumber and boxes, the latter for packing the knit goods made at Bennington; George W. KNAPP, manufacturer of lumber and chair stuff; Elmer Gleason, saw-mill; Stephen E. GLEASON and Charles F. WOOD, (GLEASON & WOOD), saw-mill; John Bugbee, saw-mill, built in 1866; Anthony W. HALTER, manufacturer of charcoal, two kilns.

At a point some four miles east of the city Enos ADAMS has a mill for the manufacture of lumber and mop handles. At the foot of the mountain the old "Foote" mill is starting up as a saw-mill. Also at Woodford City are two good hotels-the Mt. Pleasant House, under the proprietorship of George W. KNAPP, and the Summit House, the proprietor of which is Cornelius CUTLER.

The population of the township of Woodford, according to the census of 1880, numbered four hundred and eighty-eight souls. At the present time it will number about the same, but slightly less if

any material variation is shown. The check list for the presidential and State election of 1888 had nearly eighty voters, but there are many persons residing in the town who are not legal voters, so as an index of what the present population may be the check list is not entirely reliable. The present grand list of Woodford is \$900. The town, since 1872, has not sent a Republican representative to the State Legislature. John ROONEY is the present representative.

The town of Woodford has two churches, the one a Union church at Woodford City, at which all denominations are entitled to hold services, provided each supplies itself with a pastor. The edifice was built in 1873, at a cost of \$1,200; the other church is located in the Hollow, and is of the denomination known as the Advent Christian Church. The society was organized in 1871 by elders of that faith, with twelve members. The church building was erected during the same year, and cost \$1,800. No services have been held here for two or three years. In the town are three schools, which are managed and supported according to the "town system," the freemen having voted to adopt that form of school management in preference to the "district system," but this is not wholly satisfactory, and it is more than possible that the town system will be abolished and the district system established. The school-houses are located – one at the Hollow, one at Woodford City, and the third in the extreme eastern part of the township. Fifty cents on the dollar is raised annually for maintenance of the schools. The present school trustees are as follows: George W. KNAPP, chairman; Myron H. WOODWARD, and Giles HARBOUR.

The present town officers of Woodford are as follows: John ROONEY, town representative; Amos ALDRICH, moderator; Amos ALDRICH, Giles HARBOUR and Elmer GLEASON, selectmen; Myron H. WOODWARD, John HARBOUR, and George W. BICKFORD, listers; George W. BICKFORD, town clerk and treasurer.

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