

Dublin Historical Society

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444 • Founded 1920

Newsletter No. 71 – November 2007

IN THE BEGINNING...

1752 AND ALL THAT

The handsome signs, kindly provided by the Women's Club, which tell motorists on Route 101 that they are entering Dublin, say 'Settled 1752'. Similar signs in other towns usually say 'Incorporated' or 'Chartered' in such-and-such a year, but we say 'Settled'. Dublin was not incorporated (by royal charter) until 1771, so using the supposed date of first settlement gives us an extra twenty-nine years of antiquity.

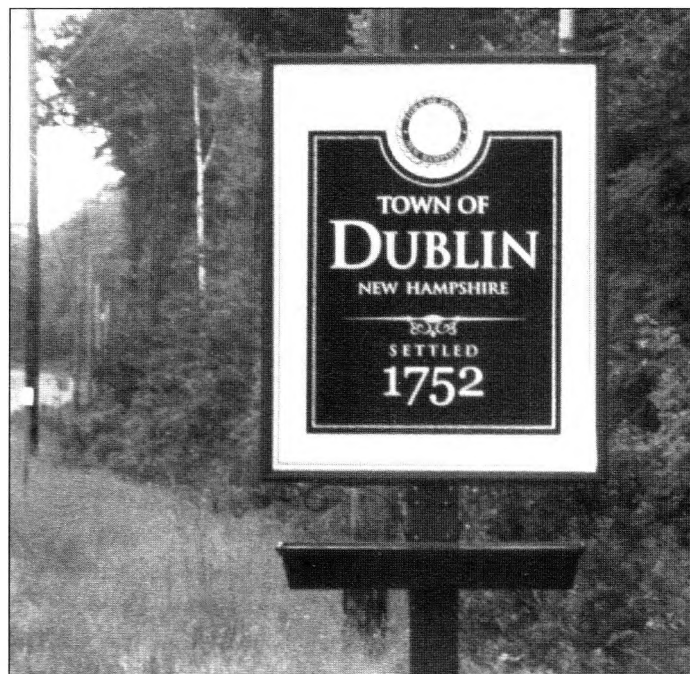
We could add another couple of years by using 1749, the date of the grant of the town by the Masonian Proprietors, but reckoning our beginning as 1752 is an old and accepted custom. Dublin's centennial celebration was held in 1852, the bicentennial in 1952 and the 250th anniversary (sesquibicentennial if you like sesquipedalian words) was, as most of us remember, duly celebrated five years ago.

Furthermore, the date, 1752, is carved in stone on a monument standing on land now owned by the Federal government as part of the MacDowell Dam reservation. A highly unscientific survey reveals that nine out of ten Dublin residents have never heard of this monument and that 99 out of 100 wouldn't be able to find it.

WHO WAS THE FIRST SETTLER?

Where did he come from and when did he come? How long was he here? The evidence turns out to be contradictory, and the earliest authorities do not wholly agree. None of them, sad to say, gives a source for his information.

The earliest known reference occurs in the address of Charles Mason, Esq., at the Centennial Celebration in 1852. Mason



Photograph by Nancy Campbell

The Winter Pot-luck Supper will be held in the Vestry of the Community Church at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, February 15, 2008.

(Snow date: February 22.)

Dan Scully will speak on plans for the renovations to the Town Hall.

Please bring a main dish, salad or dessert.



was the son of Thaddeus Mason, Jr., born in Dublin in 1770, and the grandson of Lt. Thaddeus Mason, one of the early settlers who came to Dublin around 1765, so there must have been some sort of oral tradition in the family about how Dublin got its start.

Here is an extract from Mason's centennial speech:

"Of the first settlement of the town, but little is known with accuracy or certainty. The first settler was William Thornton, who established himself where Mr. Isaac Appleton now lives, probably in the year 1752. His daughter, Molly Thornton, it is said, was the first child born in the township. He remained but a few years, – it is not known how long, – when he abandoned his settlement, it is supposed through fear of the Indians, and never returned."

Note the cautious modifiers: "probably", "it is said", "it is supposed". Still, that the first settler's name was William Thornton seems to be generally agreed.

WHO WAS WILLIAM THORNTON?

Not much is known about him, but a great deal is known about his elder brother, Matthew (c. 1714-1803). Matthew was, among many other things, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Signers have had a lot of attention from historians. Matthew was the third and William the fifth child of a James Thornton, who probably immigrated with his father, another James, from Londonderry, Ireland, around 1718. The family settled in Worcester, Mass., so if, as is supposed, William was born about 1720, Worcester was very likely his birthplace.

Matthew, the famous brother, became active in New Hampshire politics, serving in various offices until 1776, when he was both Speaker of the New Hampshire House of Representatives and a delegate to the Continental Congress. He did not arrive in Philadelphia until November, 1776, too late to participate in the framing of the Declaration, but was allowed to sign it anyway.

As has been said, the Masonian Proprietors sold the town, then called "North Menadnock or Number three", in November, 1749. The buyers were a syndicate headed by Matthew Thornton and including thirty-nine other prominent men (but not

William). There is no record that any of them ever visited the town, the shares often being sold and resold before any actual settlers arrived.

Let us go back to brother William, our Thornton. Charles Thornton Adams, a family genealogist writing at the beginning of the 20th century, says that William acquired a farm in Palmer, Mass., (then known as 'the Elbows') in 1744. This is confirmed by a deed executed in 1744 by which William Thornton purchased 100 acres in that town. Adams further says that the first three of William's children were born in Palmer, so somewhere along the line he must have acquired a wife, but there is no record of her name. Adams goes on:

"In March, 1748, William sold his farm at Palmer, and became the first settler of Dublin, N.H., which town was granted in 1749 to Hon. Matthew Thornton and others."

WHEN DID WILLIAM THORNTON COME TO DUBLIN?

That William sold his land at Palmer in March, 1748, is borne out by an extant deed, and Mr. Adams seems to assume that he came from Palmer directly to Dublin. Other authorities disagree and no written evidence of his arrival survives. Charles Mason says "probably" in 1752. The Rev. Levi Leonard, in his *History of Dublin* (1855) doesn't give a date. The Rev. Josiah Seward plumps unequivocally for 1752. But Adams says:

"Two children were born to William Thornton during his residence in Dublin, a daughter, Molly, in 1749, said to have been the first white child born in that town, and a son, Thomas, born probably in 1751. William Thornton remained in Dublin until about 1753, when he left on account of the Indians, and with his family moved to Schenectady, N.Y...."

If Molly Thornton was born in Dublin in 1749, then the actual first settlement must have been at least three years before the conventional date of 1752. (As to son Thomas, Adams is less assured. Here he says that he was born in Dublin 'probably' in 1751, but five pages later he says that Thomas was born in 1751, 'probably' in Dublin.)

So there is some conflict as to the date of William Thornton's arrival. That he was here by 1752 is, however, borne out by a convincing piece of contemporary evidence. In that year he bought several parcels of land in Sharon, Jaffrey, Rindge and Fitzwilliam (none in Dublin), and the deed describes him as "of Monadnock No. 3", which is what Dublin used to be called. Pending the discovery of further information, 1752 is probably as good a date as any to stick with.

WHERE DID WILLIAM THORNTON SETTLE?

The site of William Thornton's settlement is not in dispute. The Rev. Levi Leonard, in his *History of Dublin* (1855), says:

DUBLIN ARTISTS AT THE THORNE GALLERY

An exhibition entitled "On Gilded Pond: The Life and Times of the Dublin Art Colony" will be at the Thorne Sagendorph Art Gallery at Keene State College from November 2nd through December 9th. A number of the objects and images in the show are on loan from the Society's collections.



Photograph by Cathy Lamontagne

"The location of William Thornton was on lot 1, range 6. Of how many persons his family consisted, or how long he remained on his farm, is not known. That he abandoned his farm for fear of the Canadian Indians, has ever been a tradition."

Reprinting Mason's address in his 1920 *History of Dublin*, the Rev. Josiah Seward adds a footnote:

"The site of Thornton's cabin was lot 1, range VI, no. 2 on the map, and is now marked by a monument. It is south-east of the Appleton (in 1916, the Hannaford) house a little way."

The Isaac Appleton homestead still stands on Brush Brook Road (Route 137), just before the road turns sharp left on the way to Hancock. Russell Saturley, a Hannaford descendant, is the present owner.

Adams, the family genealogist, adds:

"The farm in Dublin on which William Thornton settled was owned by Hon. Matthew Thornton, and was subsequently sold by him to Dea. Isaac Appleton."

The first of these statements appears to be incorrect. Members of the syndicate that bought the town from the Masonian Proprietors divided up the town by drawing lots. Lot 1 in Range 6 was drawn by a Henry Wallis (or Wallace). Wallis

eventually sold this lot and several others to Matthew Thornton, but not until 1763. So William apparently settled on land owned neither by himself nor his brother. Why he chose to settle on someone else's land remains something of a mystery.

WHAT BECAME OF WILLIAM THORNTON?

It seems agreed that William left Dublin some time in the 1750s. Adams says he moved to Schenectady in 1753. That he was there by 1767 is shown by a record of his service in the local militia. A deed of 1770 describes him as "of Curry's Brook, New York".

William and his nameless wife had six children – all boys except for Molly, the supposed first white child born in Dublin. Of her, genealogist Adams says only, "Descendants, if any, have not been traced." The sons all left descendants, some of whom returned to New Hampshire while others stayed in New York State or moved westward from there.

Late in life William himself returned to New Hampshire, ending up in Thornton (named for his famous brother), a town on the Pemigewasset north of Plymouth, where he is said to have died in 1790.

THE MONUMENT

The monument consists of a slate slab surrounded by a circle of small rocks. The top of the slab stands about three feet above ground level, and is 21 inches wide and an inch and a quarter thick. These words are carved on the monument:

The first white settlement
in Dublin, N.H.
was made here by
Col. William Thornton
in 1752,
in 6th Range, Lot No. 1

Will each visitor please add
a small stone to this
monumental pile.

Surprisingly, we can find no record of when or by whom the monument was erected. Its material (slate) and the style of lettering suggest a date in the early 19th century, probably around 1830. It is odd that neither Charles Mason nor Levi Leonard, writing at the time of the first Centennial, mentions the existence of a monument. The earliest reference is by Adams the genealogist, whose pamphlet was published in 1905.

The location of the monument is marked on the 1906 Wadsworth map (of which many of us own copies) as number 2 in Range VI, Lot 1, about a quarter of a mile south of the junction of Spring Road with Route 137. The fact that the monument is (by a few feet) on Federal land gives some assurance that it will not be disturbed, and makes it possible, if not altogether easy, for the public to visit it. If there was ever an access trail, it has long since grown over. The Historical Society Trustees visited it some years ago and John Nelson guided a

group through the woods to see it on Dublin Day, 2004. If there are expressions of interest, the Historical Society would be glad to arrange another expedition.

Finally, the monument to the *first* settlement must not be confused with another monument, at the other end of town, to the first *permanent* settlement. On a rock at the end of a stone wall near the golf club house, at the intersection of the Old Troy and Old Marlborough Roads, there is this inscription:

1762

THOMAS MORSE, THE FIRST SETTLER TO STAY IN DUBLIN,
BUILT HIS HOUSE HERE. HE WAS AN ARDENT PATRIOT, WAS
CAPTAIN OF THE FIRST MILITARY COMPANY AND WAS APPOINTED
BY GOV. WENTWORTH TO CONDUCT THE ELECTION FOR FIRST
TOWN OFFICERS.

Thomas Morse was an interesting person, but we'll save him for another day.

RESEARCH NOTE

We who are used to finding out almost everything about any contemporary on the internet may be surprised to discover how much can be learned about someone who lived two centuries ago. Land records, probate records, and town records of vital statistics are only some of the places in which our forebears left paper trails.

For help in research for this article, I am especially indebted to Frank Mevers and Brian Burford at the New Hampshire State Archives, as well as to Bill Copeley at the New Hampshire Historical Society's Tuck Library. The staff at the Hampden County Registry of Deeds in Springfield, Mass., were also very helpful, as were the Town Clerks in Thornton, N.H. and Palmer, Mass.

Wishing to be a proper scholar, but not to festoon this article with footnotes, I have prepared a fully annotated version, which is on file at the Archives.

—J.W.H.

—P.R.B.

SOCIETY NEWS

At the Annual Meeting in August, Matt Wagner was elected, and Rusty Bastedo and John Harris were re-elected, Trustees for three-year terms. Rusty Bastedo and Bill Goodwin were re-elected President and Treasurer, respectively. The present Trustees & Officers are:

Rusty Bastedo, President and Curator
Bill Goodwin, Treasurer
John Harris, Secretary and Archivist
Amedine Bella
Henry James
Rosemary Mack
Sharron Monaghan
Matt Wagner

C R E D I T S

This issue of the Dublin Historical Society
Newsletter was edited by John Harris.

Design & layout by Heidi Thomas
of Little House Graphics.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As is customary, a dues notice comes with this newsletter. This year the trustees voted an increase in dues for the first time in over ten years, an increase needed to offset the ever-rising cost of printing and postage. In addition, since the schoolhouse was moved we have installed electric and heating systems, which add to our annual expenses. Our dues have long lagged behind other similar organizations and the new schedule brings us into line.

We hope that members will understand our efforts to hold price increases for 2008 membership to an absolute minimum, and will continue their support of our mission to acquaint old and new generations of Dubliners with their history.

In the course of last summer the outside of the 1841 Schoolhouse got a fresh coat of paint, and more recently the trees around it have been trimmed, leaving the building and the Civil War monument more visible from the street.

Our 2008 DHS calendar features antique postcards from our collection and was prepared by Town and DHS Archivist Nancy Campbell. It should be ready for distribution and/or pickup by mid-November. We will plan to sell copies from the card table outside the Post Office on Saturdays before Christmas, and you can order copies as stocking stuffers, at \$10 per copy plus \$3 postage and handling, by e-mailing dublinhistory@townofdublin.org, or calling 603-563-8545.

RECENT ACCESSIONS AT THE ARCHIVES

In aid of our mission to record history as it goes by we have received three significant collections of contemporary photographs. President **Rusty Bastedo** has made a photographic diary of the reconstruction of the Lake Club and golf clubhouses. Trustee **Sharron Monaghan** has been recording the demolition of the former Beech Hill Hospital. To make her photographs more instructive, **John Nelson** has made a ground plan showing the location of the hospital buildings as they were.

After the unfortunate fire at "Homewood", **George McLean** gave us copies of a set of interior and exterior photographs of the house, which will be a permanent record of how it looked. Once again, we are obliged to **John Nelson** for a plan of the house which makes the sequence of photographs clear. Through the kindness of **Karen Horgan** and the *Monadnock Ledger Transcript*, we were able to add some action shots of the fire itself.

Our grateful thanks to them all, as well as to all our other thoughtful donors.