

# Dublin Historical Society

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## *Dublin's Earliest Settlers*

by William L. Bauhan

*Among the papers of the late (and much lamented) William L. Bauhan were found the first two chapters of an uncompleted history of Dublin, apparently written in the early 1980's. The following article is drawn from chapter one.*

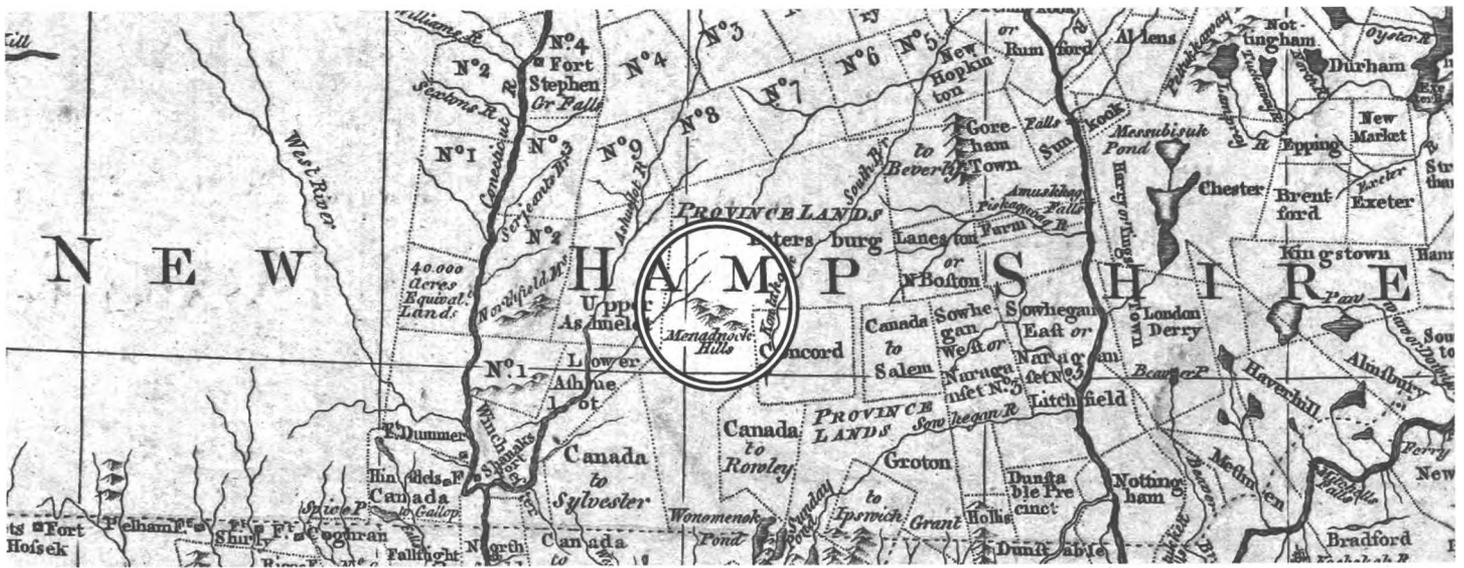
“I set out for my new home on foot,” wrote Samuel Appleton, “carrying the greater part of my wardrobe on my back and the remainder tied up in a bandana handkerchief.” The year was 1786, and Appleton, then twenty years old, was on his way to Dublin, New Hampshire, where he was to teach school. “I was to board at Mr. and Mrs. Fairbanks,” he continues. “Their house was made of logs with only one room in it, which served for the parlor, kitchen, and bedroom. I slept on a trundle bed which during the day was wheeled under the large bed ...”

The tall flaxen-haired young schoolmaster, who had walked over the hills from his native New Ipswich some fifteen miles to the east, remained in Dublin for only about four months. His pay was two dollars a week. His recollection of the primitive housing in what was still a frontier community in the uplands of southwestern New Hampshire was written when he was a very old man for Dublin's centennial festivities in 1852. In the intervening years remarkable advances had occurred in the fortunes of the town, and even more so in the fortunes of Appleton himself. When he died

in Boston the following year, aged 87, his cousin and executor William Appleton meticulously recorded the value of his estate at \$1,165,289.63—a sum which in those days made him one of the wealthiest men in New England, if not the United States. Even that was deceptive, however, because Samuel Appleton had already given substantial sums in benefactions to Dartmouth, Harvard, Appleton Academy in New Ipswich, and other institutions, including a modest check for one thousand dollars to Dublin schools enclosed with his centennial address. Although he deserted the classroom for the counting house, Samuel's ardent interest in education never abated. He possessed that rare combination of traits: a scholarly mind, a kindly and benevolent nature—though at times hot-tempered—and a canny business sense. One fortune builder is noteworthy in any family; the Appletons produced three in one generation. Besides Samuel, his younger brother Nathan and his first cousin William (to both of whom he acted as mentor) each acquired great wealth in the export-import trade and joined the ranks of Boston's “codfish aristocracy.” Samuel Appleton, merchant prince and philanthropist, ended his days childless in his splendid mansion on Beacon Hill, but the Appleton family, his brothers, cousins, and their descendants, thread their way through the annals of Dublin from its early settlement, in its evolution as a summer resort, and up to the present day.



Note cards featuring a selection of 5 paintings by Abbott Thayer are now available. See enclosed order form.



Section of map from 1771, the year Dublin was officially incorporated by King George III, published by Carington Bowles, London. It shows the "Monadnock Hills" (inside circle) as a prominent feature in a sparsely populated region. (Library of Congress, Geography & Map Division)

Although Dublin counted its one hundredth anniversary from 1752, the first permanent settlers did not actually arrive until 1760, a single generation before Samuel Appleton walked over the hills to teach there. The time lag in settlement can perhaps be most clearly understood by comparing Dublin and the town of Groton, Massachusetts (where the youthful Samuel also lived for a brief time). The distance between them is short, barely thirty-five miles by the old road from Boston. A traveller today can drive it in well less than an hour. From Groton, and even from as far away as Boston, the profile of Mount Monadnock, Dublin's chief natural landmark, is visible on the northwestern horizon. Yet, close as they are, these two small picturesque New England towns were founded a full century apart. A time span of five generations was necessary to advance the frontier of British coastal settlement from Groton's founding in 1659 (only two decades after Plymouth Rock) to Dublin's first permanent settlement (a mere fifteen years before the outbreak of the American Revolution).

Apart from the visible outline of Monadnock—and that at times must have seemed forbidding—the remote uplands of southwestern New Hampshire were virtual terra incognita to ordinary English settlers, an inhospitable tract of unbroken forest and trackless highland wilderness, populated only by wolves, bears, and other beasts. Indian artifacts are almost non-existent in the region, a sign that even the roving Algonquin tribes, though they hunted on Monadnock and worshiped it from afar, found little there to attract them, preferring instead the milder and more fertile river valleys of the Merrimack to the east and the Connecticut to the west. These same river valleys and other stream courses throughout northern New England also served as natural avenues for new settlers heading to the interior from older coastal communities.

The obstacles to settlement of the upland region were both natural and of man's making. Not only did the hills east and south of Monadnock pose formidable barriers, but the rocky terrain and thin soil offered little inducement to pioneer farmers when more arable valley land was accessible elsewhere. Furthermore, the region lay in an area of boundary dispute between the provinces of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, thus leaving in question legal titles to land. If that were not enough to deter settlers, the area was vulnerable to sporadic but nonetheless bloody attacks by the Indian tribes allied to the French in Canada. Settlers in outposts, especially along the Connecticut River, lived in dread of these surprise guerilla-like forays that accompanied the recurrent wars between France and England during the eighteenth century. Despite the barriers, a party of surveyors had broken through the wilderness to the foot of Monadnock as early as 1704, and hardy pioneers had ventured into the then western frontier to settle the valleys on either side of Dublin at Keene (1736) and Peterborough (1739). Even then, these settlements were abandoned temporarily because of Indian raids during the 1740s.

In that very decade, the 1740s, came jurisdictional resolutions that removed legal impediments to organized settlement of the region. The status of New Hampshire was clarified in 1740 when King George II decreed it an independent royal province and appointed Benning Wentworth governor. By 1749 Wentworth granted the establishment of a group of Monadnock townships, of which Dublin was mapped as "No. 3" or "North Monadnock." Three years earlier with the blessings of the governor—whose eye seldom strayed from the main chance—a syndicate of twelve Portsmouth businessmen arranged a transaction to clear the way for the development of these townships. The group, including several of the governor's relatives, bought

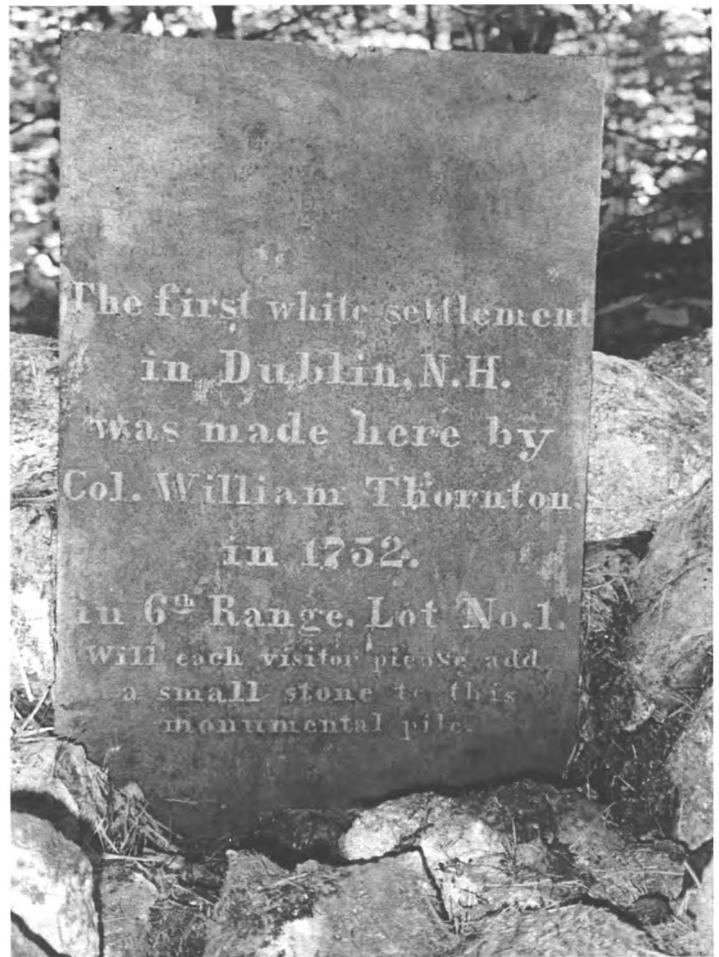
the so-called Masonian lands from Boston merchant John Tufton Mason, lineal heir of Captain John Mason, the original grantee of 1629. The tract covered an extensive area stretching in a wide arc from the coast of Maine through central and southwestern New Hampshire. It was the largest real estate transaction of the period.

The new owners, thereafter known as the Masonian Proprietors, proceeded to sell shares to investors, most of them prosperous merchants and land speculators with little or no interest in settling the new towns themselves. Dublin's original grantees of 1749, for example, comprised forty individuals, none of whom became settlers. The largest landowner was Irish-born Dr. Matthew Thornton, a physician, judge, and respected figure in the colony who at one time owned nearly a third of the land in Dublin by acquiring shares from other investors. Unlike the other grantees, Thornton, who was later a signer of the Declaration of Independence, took "a deep interest in the settlement of the town" and knew personally some of its first inhabitants. One of them, Captain Andrew Allison, recalled that "he was always telling stories such as a boy loved to hear." He was regarded as "one of the most companionable of men" with an "inexhaustible stock of information ... his memory well stored with a large fund of entertaining and instructive anecdotes, which he could apply upon any incident or subject of conversation." Undoubtedly Judge Thornton's interest led his brother, Colonel William Thornton, to become the first settler in 1752 on the eastern edge of town near the Peterborough line. The younger Thornton's attempt, however, was short-lived, and probably at the outbreak of the French and Indian War three years later, fear of Indian raids drove him away, never to return. No trace remains of his dwelling, except for a cairn of stones and a plaque erected later to mark the site on the east side of the Hancock Road.

The Masonian Proprietors, as John Borden Armstrong writes, laid down "very specific conditions" for settlement: certain lots were reserved for the support of religion and education; others were reserved for the Proprietors; a meetinghouse was to be built within a specified time. The grants also contained detailed timetables for settlement: so many acres in each share to be cleared, fenced, and prepared for sowing and tillage within so many years; dwelling houses to be built and occupied by such and such a time; and so on.

These conditions were more honored in the breach than the observance. Delays and difficulties in settlement often made them impractical, especially in a remote hill town like Dublin, and by and large most were not fulfilled—at least not according to timetable.

The Proprietors laid out Dublin, as they did other towns, in a checkerboard pattern, dividing it into 220 lots



Historic plaque marks the site where Dublin's first settler, William Thornton, put down his stakes in 1752. (Dublin Archives photo)

shaped more like parallelograms than rectangles, comprising roughly a hundred or more acres per lot. The initial price for the lots averaged about £24 per 300 acres. The township was itself a parallelogram in shape and included the southern portions of present day Harrisville.

The machinery for development was in place, legal tangles had been cleared, boundary disputes resolved, and yet there was no stampede of settlers—excepting the unfortunate William Thornton's abortive effort. So long as the threat of Indian attacks remained, there was little chance of concerted settlement of the region. This last obstacle was overcome—and it proved the watershed in opening Dublin to habitation—when Lord Jeffrey Amherst and his British regulars subdued the French bastion of Louisbourg in 1758 and Quebec fell before Wolfe the following year, effectively ending the power of the French and their Indian allies, as the entire eastern portion of the continent fell under British control. Although the peace treaty ending the Seven Years War was not signed until 1763, the way had been cleared.

The two separate bands of settlers who came beginning about 1760 consisted of about a half-dozen Scotch-Irish families and a larger group of settlers of English stock from Sherborn, Massachusetts, a small town southwest of

## NEWS FROM THE ARCHIVES

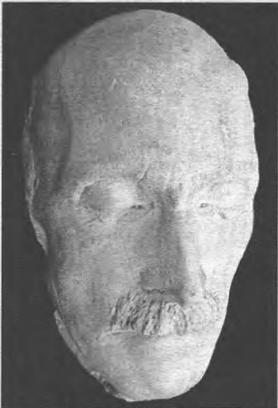
Rosemary Mack has kindly volunteered to work at the Archives one morning a week. She will help with the management of our ever-growing collection of photographs.

**New Accessions:** Early in the morning of Saturday, September 17, word came from two sources that a trunkful of letters and photographs, having to do with a Dublin family, were to be sold at auction at the Cobbs' gallery in Peterborough. The President and Archivist (Henry James and John Harris) hastened over to have a look, and found that the trunk was full to the brim of letters, photographs and account books of the family of Oscar C. Sewall, his mother, Josef Crosby Sewall Backus, and his step-father, Grosvenor Backus, who lived in both "Beech Hill" (later Beech Hill Hospital) and "Spur House" (now owned by John and Ann Clarkeson).

It was impossible to get more than a vague idea of the contents of the trunk, but, their collectors' instinct being aroused, Henry and John returned for the sale in the afternoon and bid for the lot against an anonymous telephone bidder who ran the price up to more than they had hoped to pay.

Having now had time for a preliminary look, John has found that nearly all the hundreds of letters were written to Josefa Sewall Backus by her husband and children in the years from 1913 to 1945. Because Mrs. Backus seems never to have thrown a letter away, the collection gives an unusually complete account of the life and travels of a family of considerable wealth in the 1920s and 30s. Most of the many photographs, as is so often sadly the case, are unidentified. Processing and cataloging of this material is expected to keep the Archivist busy all winter.

**Museum Accession:** We have received a death mask of Abbott Thayer cast in plaster of Paris by Alexander James and donated by his son Michael James. According to Michael, his father made this mask on the afternoon of Thayer's death on May 29, 1921. The mask is on display at the Archives in a handsome display case made by Caleb Niemela.



Boston. The first to break into the primeval forest were the Scotch-Irish. They migrated via Peterborough from Londonderry, New Hampshire, home of their compatriot, Dr. Thornton, who probably influenced them to plant a colony in Dublin. In their vanguard was Alexander Scott, who built a small one-story frame house near the outlet of Dublin Lake as early as 1758. Scott's house stood beside what was already a cleared pathway, later to become known as "The Great Road," leading west to Vermont and the Lake Champlain forts. The Great Road, even by this time, was known as "the only road from Portsmouth through this province to Number Four," the key frontier fort on the upper Connecticut River. Predecessor to the present State Route 101, this earliest east-west road ran south of Dublin Lake and became the main pathway to Dublin's settlement and helped define the pattern of its future growth. Dublin, perched astride the watershed to the Merrimack on one side and the Connecticut on the other, drew its early settlers almost entirely from Massachusetts, while the early migration to Keene in the valley to the west came up the river from the towns of Connecticut.

In this primitive, roadside structure Scott kept a tavern, or what passed for one, where he put up wayfarers, among them provincial soldiers—members of Rogers' Rangers according to legend—bound west in the summer of 1758

to join General Abercromby at Crown Point. Within four years, however, Scott and his son William ("Long Bill") an officer in the French and Indian Wars, pulled up stakes and returned to settle in Peterborough. Before the decade was out the rest of the Scotch-Irish departed as well—with the lone exception of a weaver named Henry Strongman. Strongman, who is believed to have come to Boston from Dublin, Ireland, by now in his forties, and his wife, Janet Alexander, remained to become Dublin's first permanent settlers. According to tradition, the town took its name from Strongman's birthplace.

Meantime the Sherborn settlers, led by the patriarchal Captain Thomas Morse and his younger cousin Eli, began arriving about 1762. The captain, described in the Town History as the "first permanent English settler," was a farmer of substantial means, whom Matthew Thornton called "the shrewdest man I ever knew." His Sherborn flock, numbering only about a dozen families in the beginning—others followed later—were nevertheless to exert a significant and enduring impact on the development of Dublin. That first season, and probably the next, none of them remained year round, but several men came during the summers (could they be called Dublin's first summer residents?) "to work on the roads" and begin clearing the virgin forest.

*(To be continued...)*