

Maine History

Volume 42
Number 3 *Oxford County's Bicentennial, 1805 - 2005*

Article 3

10-1-2005

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Recommended Citation

Hankins, Jean F.. "Settling Oxford County: Maine's Revolutionary War Bounty Myth." *Maine History* 42, 3 (2005): 134-157. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol42/iss3/3>

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Although Seth Sturtevant (1760-1852) was a member of George Washington's Life Guard during the American Revolution and an early settler of the Oxford County town of Sumner, he received no land bounty until 1835. In that year, after he declared that he had never "received any Land or Money from Massachusetts Bay," the State of Maine granted him a certification good for 200 acres in one of the northeastern counties. Sturtevant almost certainly followed the customary practice of authorizing his agent to sell the land. Illustration from *Centennial History of the Town of Sumner, Maine* 1899, courtesy of the author.

SETTLING OXFORD COUNTY: MAINE'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR BOUNTY MYTH

BY JEAN F. HANKINS

It is a common assumption that many New England frontier towns were founded by veterans of the Revolutionary War who had been given land for their service to the country. Author Jean Hankins's careful research in deeds, records, and legislative acts shows that this was not the case in representative Oxford County towns. Although there were a variety of bounties given for land in these towns, few had anything to do with the Revolutionary War. The Revolutionary War bounty myth persists, the author speculates, because it is an appealing way to begin the history of these towns, and because, since many of the town founders were indeed Revolutionary War veterans, historians have reduced a very complex process to a simple cause and effect relation. Jean Hankins is an independent researcher and an archivist for the Otisfield Historical Society. She has written elsewhere for MAINE HISTORY, including her "Cage for John Sawyer" (vol. 34), which won the Society's James Phinney Baxter Award, and her "Every Town Shall Maintain their own Poor" (volume 39).

ONE OF the most time-honored pieces of historical lore in rural Maine is the belief that the first settlers were Revolutionary War veterans who received their land as a bounty for their military service. The recollections of Nellie Pottle Hankins, recorded in 1945, provide a good example of this tradition: "my father's father . . . remembered that [his grandfather] Ebenezer [Kemp] always walked with a limp. One of those old-time heavy cannon shot grazed his hip at the Battle of Bunker Hill. That is how he happened to come here [to Otisfield]. At the end of the Revolutionary War, many of the soldiers were given land in this unexplored section. It was part of Massachusetts then." Variations of this account can be found also in many town histories. For instance, in 1886 William B. Lapham wrote in *The History of Norway* that "Massachusetts had little money with which to reward her soldiers, but

she had a plenty of land which was bestowed with a generous and liberal hand." As recently as 2004, local historians Howard C. Reiche and Hugh G. Chapman stated in their history of Gilead that "Massachusetts veterans of the Revolutionary War were allowed to claim land as a veteran's bonus."¹

A careful study of the records of the settlement of the thirty-four towns in today's Oxford County, which now includes Otisfield, Norway, and Gilead, indicates that the assumption that Revolutionary War veterans received free land in return for military service is incorrect. The assumption is based on some complex historical facts that, over the years, have led to the wrong conclusion. First, in the eighteenth century Massachusetts did grant a number of townships to its veterans. However, these grants, made decades before the Revolution, were to veterans of earlier wars, not the Revolution. It is also true that many American Revolution veterans from Massachusetts did move to the part of Maine that became Oxford County. Many of these did get land free, or almost free. As this essay will show, they did not receive the land as compensation for their military service but for reasons relative to traditional settlements practices in early frontier towns. Finally, while nineteenth-century state legislators, first Massachusetts and later Maine, did bestow some townships on Revolutionary War veterans, none of this land was in Oxford County.²

The Revolutionary bounty myth may be strongest in the six Oxford County towns—present-day Bethel, Otisfield, Waterford, Canton, Lovell, and Sweden—which originated as land grants given to Massachusetts veterans (see Table 1 facing page). But all six of these towns were granted between 1768 and 1774, before the outbreak of the American Revolution. These grants were made, in most cases, for military service performed as far back as the late seventeenth century.

WE AMERICANS tend to revere and commemorate our war for independence but we have never been much concerned about the earlier wars in which the colonists fought between the 1670s and the 1760s. Among these was a long series of conflicts with the French and their Indian allies in Canada, and specifically an expedition to Quebec in 1690. This was an early naval expedition led by Sir William Phips in which many Massachusetts men participated. The Massachusetts government had promised to pay its soldiers in loot and plunder from the French citadel. Instead the expedition ended in disaster. The surviving soldiers sailed back home with empty pockets. They—or their heirs—

TABLE 1

PRINCIPAL EARLY LAND GRANTS AND SALES IN OXFORD COUNTY, MAINE

Date	Reference	Current Town	Type	Grantee
1762	MA:404	Fryeburg	Individual	Joseph Frye
1764	MA:223	Brownfield	Individual	Henry Y. Brown
1768	MA:26	Bethel	Veterans	Josiah Richardson, <i>et al.</i> Canada Expedition of 1690
1771	MA:12	Paris/West Paris	Individuals	Joshua Fuller, <i>et al.</i> Replacement of N.H. land
1771	MA:11	Jay/Canton	Veterans	David Phips, <i>et al.</i> Canada Expedition of 1690
1771	MA:22	Otisfield	Veterans	James Otis, <i>et al.</i> Canada Expedition of 1690 Replacement of N.H. land
1772	MA:44	Gilead	Individuals	Oliver Peabody, <i>et al.</i>
1774	MA:77	Rumford	Individuals	Timothy Walker, <i>et al.</i> Replacement of N.H. land
1774	MA:89	Lovell/Sweden	Veterans	Noah Johnson, <i>et al.</i> Lovewell's War of 1725 Replacement of N.H. land
1774	MA:121	Waterford	Individuals	John Gardner, <i>et al.</i> Replacement of N.H. land
1777	MA:901	Hebron/Oxford	Cartographic Service	Alexander Shepard, Jr.
1780	MA:184	Norway (central)	Diplomatic Service	Arthur Lee
1787	DC:15,447	Norway (south)	Individual	Henry Rust
1787	DC:16,455	Hartford/Sumner	Individuals	Joel Parkhurst, Samuel Butterfield, <i>et al.</i>
1787	MR:91	Hiram (part)	Individual	Timothy Cutler
1787	MR:62	Andover	Individuals	Enoch Adams, <i>et al.</i>
1788	CSEL	Norway (north)	Individual	Jonathan Cummings
1788	CSEL	Stow (part)	Individuals	John Bradley & Jonathan Eastman
1788	DC:18,464	Buckfield	Individuals	Abijah Buck, <i>et al.</i>
1790	CSEL	Hiram (part)	Individual	Peleg Wadsworth

1790	DC:17,90	Peru (part)	Individual	Daniel Lunt
1791	DY:56,281a	Albany	Individuals	Joseph Holt, <i>et al.</i>
1791	DC:20,223	Mexico/Dixfield	Individuals	Jonathan Holman, <i>et al.</i>
1791	CSEL	Porter	Individuals	Jeremiah Hill, Aaron Porter, <i>et al.</i>
1791	CSEL	Denmark (part)	Individual	Asahel Foster
1792	MR:159	Denmark (part)	Academy	Fryeburg Academy
1792	CSEL	Hanover	Individual	Phineas Howard
1794	CSEL	Roxbury	Individual	John Derby
1794	CSEL	Byron	Individual	Sarah Waldo
1795	MR:94	Peru (part)	Individuals	Isaac Thompson, <i>et al.</i>
1796	DY:58,234c	Newry (A No. 3)	Individual	Sarah Bostwick
1796	DY:59,1	Grafton (A. No. 2)	Individual	John T. Holmes
1796	DY:59,2a	Riley (A No. 1)	Individual	Phebe Ketcham
1797	MR:45	Greenwood (south)	Academy	Phillips Academy
1797	MR:125	Andover W. Surplus	Individuals	Ebenezer Poor, <i>et al.</i>
1800	DC:33,487	Woodstock (west)	Academy	Dummer Academy
1800	MR:27	Greenwood (north)	Individuals	Eleazer Twitchell, <i>et al.</i>
1800	DF:1,169	Stoneham (part)	Academy	Fryeburg Academy
1800	DF:1,169	Mason Twp. (part)	Academy	Fryeburg Academy
1801	MR:156	Letter C	Individuals	Zebina Curtis, Jesse Williams
1803	MR:32	Woodstock (east)	Academy	Gorham Academy
1804	MR:14	Upton (Letter B)	Individuals	Ann S. Davies, Ezra Hounsfield

Legend: CSEL Committee for the Sale of Eastern Lands, Report cited below.
 DC:xx,y Deeds of Cumberland County:Volume, Page.
 DF:xx,y Deeds of Oxford County, Fryeburg Registry:Volume, Page.
 DY:xx,y Deeds of York County:Volume, Page.
 MA:xx Massachusetts *Acts*:Chapter of the annual session indicated.
 MR:xx Massachusetts *Resolves*:Chapter of the annual session indicated.

Sources: CSEL Massachusetts. General Court. Committee for the Sales of Eastern Lands. *Report of the Committee for the Sale of Eastern Lands, containing their accounts from the 28th of October, 1783, to the 16th of June, 1795.* [Boston: s.n., s.d.]
 MA Massachusetts. *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay.* Boston: Wright & Potter, 1869-1922. [For legislative sessions of 1691-1780.]
 MR Massachusetts. *Resolves of the General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.* Boston: Adams & Rhodes, 1780-1838.

would not receive final compensation for almost seventy years.

For decades after these colonial wars, the General Court was besieged with petitions from its veterans, including those of the 1690 military companies. All asked to be compensated with land grants in some “un-occupied” part of the province. Because the period from 1727 to 1739 was one of relative calm, Massachusetts was finally able to begin granting land to its veterans. In doing so, the General Court’s motives were not purely altruistic. When considering land grants in its “vacant” lands in the western and eastern parts of the province, Massachusetts was also hoping to create a defensive buffer of new towns to protect its older settled areas. By means of the new land grants it also hoped to strengthen its claims to territory challenged by the upstart colony of New Hampshire. These land grants would also relieve the population pressure that emerged in the province’s coastal towns, especially those around Boston.³

For all these reasons, in the late 1720s and 1730s Massachusetts set about systematically granting townships in tiers to the west and north of Boston. A number of 1733 grants made to veterans of King Philip’s War, 1675-1678, resulted in what became known as Narragansett towns. None of these grants resulted in any Oxford County towns, but some were in what would become the state of Maine, such as Narragansett No. 1 (now Buxton), and Narragansett No. 7 (now Gorham). Most of the grants made in this period were given names prefixed by “New,” as with the townships of New Gloucester, New Marblehead (now Windham), and New Boston (now Gray). The first grant involving one of today’s Oxford County towns was made in 1727 to the survivors of “Lovewell’s Battle,” fought against Maine Indians in 1725. The veterans of this conflict received a township vaguely defined as somewhere north of the Merrimac River. This grant was the genesis of the Maine towns of Lovell and Sweden.⁴

Soon Massachusetts began granting land to the heirs of the 1690 Canada expedition. In response to a 1734 petition, for example, the General Court granted a township six miles square to the military company, or their heirs, commanded by Captain John Gorham of Barnstable. As with the other new grants, this new township was to be placed somewhere north of the Merrimac River and contiguous to another town. This grant was the basis of today’s Oxford County town of Otisfield. A group of veterans belonging to a military company based in Sudbury sent similar petitions. So began the town known first as “Sudbury Canada” and now as Bethel. A 1735 grant to John Whitman and others

in Captain Gardner's 1690 company became first "No. 6" and eventually the Maine town of Waterford. Yet another grant was made to John Phips and others of Wrentham. First called "Phips Canada," this grant eventually resulted in the Oxford County town of Canton and the Franklin County town of Jay.⁵

By about 1735 the veterans of the 1690 Canada expedition, or their heirs, finally had their compensation. Or so they thought. Forces beyond their control intervened. First, the land they had been granted turned out to be in New Hampshire and not in Massachusetts. This was not fully realized until 1740 when a royal commission finally settled the disputed boundary between the two provinces. Much to its surprise, Massachusetts lost out. As one historian put it, "Bashful little New Hampshire was given more than she had asked for, and arrogant Massachusetts was given no satisfaction at all." Some forty Massachusetts towns and settlements were now in New Hampshire, including eight of the so-called Canada towns.⁶ The Canada grantees thus had invalid titles. Another unfavorable circumstance was that about 1739 the war with France flared up again and continued with little respite until 1760. With its frontier besieged, Massachusetts was in no position to make new land grants to compensate its veterans for the invalid New Hampshire towns.

In 1768, with peace finally established, the Massachusetts General Court began solving the problem of the invalid New Hampshire grants by making a new series of compensatory grants, this time well inside the province's boundaries. In that year Josiah Richardson and fifty-four others petitioned for a new grant to compensate for the "Suffering and Service" of their ancestors in the 1690 expedition. They were rewarded with a new township, now Bethel, which was to be positioned east of the Saco River. In 1771 a similar grant, now the towns of Canton and Jay, was made to another group to compensate for their earlier faulty grant in New Hampshire. That same year James Otis and a group of other men from the Boston area received a township in compensation for the town they had received in 1735 which turned out to be located south of Concord, New Hampshire. Finally, in 1774, the heirs of Captain Gardner's Company received a seven-mile square grant, now Waterford, to replace their previous grant, which is now Henniker, New Hampshire.⁷

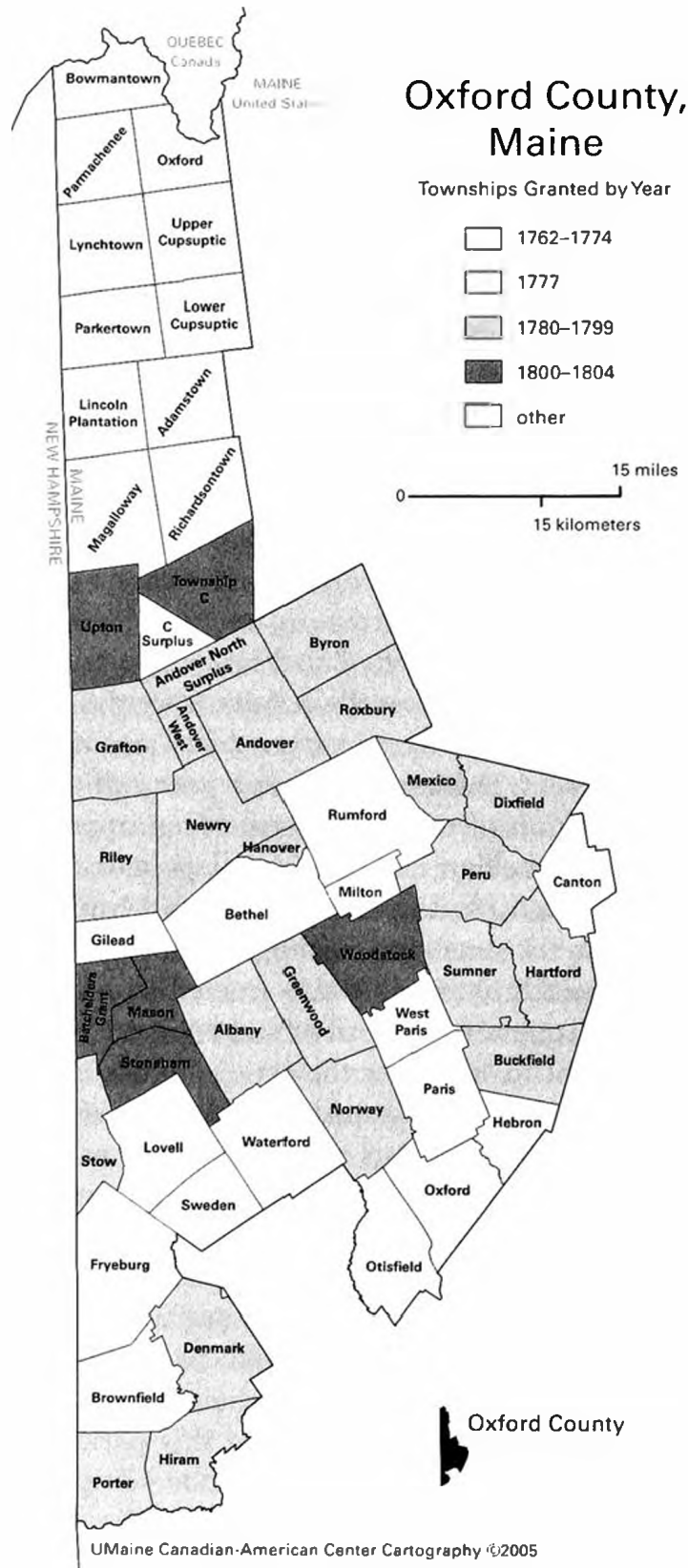
IN THE area of Maine that is now Oxford County, on the eve of the American Revolution, the towns of Bethel, Canton, Otisfield, and Waterford had been bestowed on some very old veterans. Historians have

called these towns “Canada towns” in recognition of their origin. Massachusetts had also granted the present-day towns of Lovell and Sweden to some slightly younger veterans. As Table 1 shows, a few years before granting the Canada towns, Massachusetts had granted the Oxford County townships of Fryeburg and Brownfield to two individuals, Colonel Joseph Frye and Captain Henry Young Brown. Both men were veterans of the French and Indian wars and, like most proprietors, were shrewd speculators alert for an opportunity to acquire, at little cost to themselves, some of the best farm land in Maine’s Saco River Valley.⁸ About fifteen more Oxford County townships were granted between 1780 and 1800. Most of these were made to a group of proprietors, and one or two to individuals. (See Table 1.) None of these grants makes any mention of Revolutionary War service.

In 1779, three years before the end of the Revolution, Massachusetts did authorize a bounty of one hundred acres of land as an incentive for a three-year enlistment in the Continental Army. However, the General Court failed to pass any enabling provision, and this bounty was never paid. The main reason Massachusetts failed to compensate its veterans either then or after the war’s end was the commonwealth’s dire financial situation. By 1783 it had \$5 million in state debts, not to mention its share of the national debt. Raising taxes was a poor option because of the determined opposition of the state’s farmers, an opposition which culminated in Shays’s Rebellion in 1786. State legislators, urged on by Governor John Hancock, looked instead at Maine’s 17 million acres of “wild land” as a cure to the state’s financial problem.

Settling the land as quickly as possible also seemed wise because of the increasing problem of squatters, some of whom believed it their Revolutionary legacy and right to take over the state’s “unoccupied” land. In 1784, therefore, the General Court established the Committee on Eastern Lands, instructing it to lay out as many townships as possible. The new townships were to be approximately six miles square and were granted with certain conditions, among them settling a minimum number of people. By 1796 the Committee had disposed of about 4.5 million acres for a total compensation of 280,000 pounds.⁹

Ironically, despite all this granting of land, in the period between 1784 and 1800 the Commonwealth of Massachusetts seemed to be generous to everyone except its veterans. During this period a group of Nova Scotians who had suffered financial losses for siding with the U.S. during the war received a large tract east of the Penobscot; the Beverly [Massachusetts] Cotton Manufactory received 8,333 acres; the Boston



City Hospital received a township; and Falmouth (now Portland) received two townships to compensate for the British destruction of the city during the war. Massachusetts was especially generous to its educational institutions, that is, its academies. In 1793 the Commonwealth passed a resolution permitting land grants “for the encouragement of literature” that resulted in forty-three separate grants, in many cases for half-townships. These grants, made between 1793 and 1818, bestowed 520 acres in Oxford County to Berwick Academy, land in what is now Greenwood to Phillips and Dummer Academies, 1,286 acres in Chandler’s Gore or Hartford to Monmouth Free School, the township of Woodstock to Gorham Academy, Franklin Plantation to Franklin Academy, and Milton Plantation to Milton Academy. Fryeburg Academy received much of Stoneham as well as portions of Mason Township and Denmark. (See Table 1.) So many academies applied for grants of land (always intending to sell it) that four years later the General Court tightened its eligibility rules.¹⁰

Until after the Revolution, the frontier turmoil resulting from nearly constant hostilities with the French and the Indians kept Maine’s population far lower than that of the rest of Massachusetts. After that time, however, thousands of young adults, especially from eastern Massachusetts, moved into the district. By 1820, Maine’s population had increased some 450 percent, from 56,000 to 300,000. That year Maine boasted 36 percent of the Massachusetts population. Most of the new growth took place in the present-day counties of York, Cumberland, and Oxford. The Maine land had two advantages: it was cheap and, for Massachusetts families, it was nearby. Because most of Oxford County towns were founded directly after the Revolution, it should not be surprising that so many of their first settlers were veterans of that war. Of the first fifty families in Otisfield, for example, at least twenty-five were headed by Revolutionary War veterans. Of the forty-seven founders of Buckfield, thirty-two served in the Revolution and eight in the French and Indian Wars. Waterford also boasted thirty Revolutionary War veterans among its early settlers.¹¹

Without question many of these Revolutionary War veterans in the years before 1800 did acquire free or cheap land in Maine—including Oxford County. But so did a great many individuals with no military service at all. Veterans and non-veterans alike received the land not as a military bounty but for one of two other reasons, both involving fulfillment of what was then known as “settling duty.”

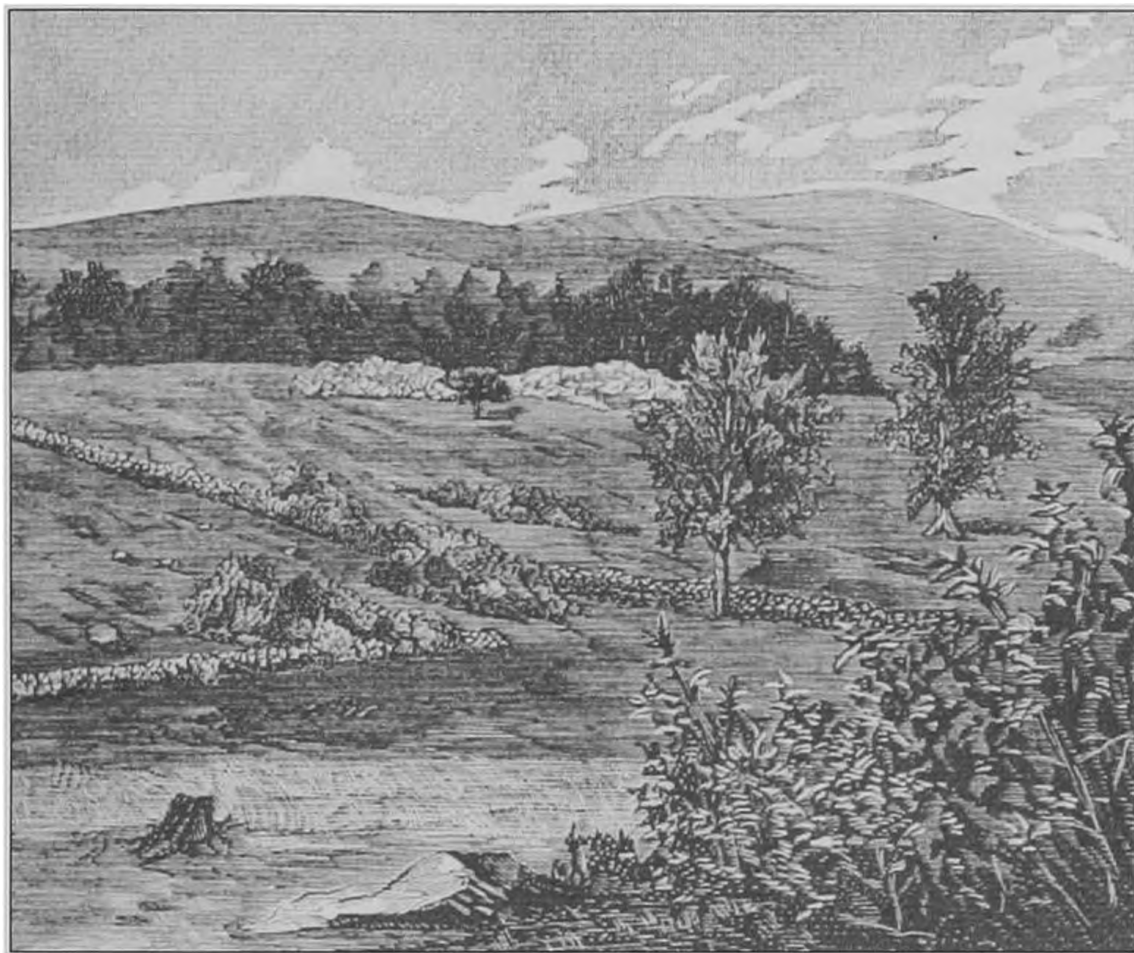
The condition of settling duty, or putting a certain number of fami-

lies on the land, was only one of several requirements imposed on the proprietors, or grantees, of the new townships.¹² Typically granted a town of six square miles or 23,000 acres, the proprietors had to return to the General Court within a year a detailed description of the tract's boundaries, accompanied by a survey. They also had to set aside certain lots for public use: to the first settled minister and to support the church, the schools, and Harvard College, which then trained most of the Protestant ministers. After about 1800 the Harvard allotment was replaced by one for the "future use" of the state government. The public lots, particularly Harvard College's, often were assigned to the least desirable spots in the grant. In Otisfield, for example, Harvard received its acres in some very wet land still known as College Swamp.

The most difficult legislative requirement for the proprietors was fulfilling the "settling duty," the condition requiring that a certain number of individuals must actually move onto the land and establish residence within a specified number of years. To insure that the settlers were good yeomen farmers and not fly-by-nighters or land and timber speculators, the General Court further required that within a certain specified period each settler must build a house of a certain minimum size (usually eighteen feet square) and clear a certain number of acres for planting or pasture. The number of families and the time limit for their settlement varied considerably. In the Oxford County townships granted before the Revolution, the numbers tended to be higher: sixty settlers in five years for the towns of Fryeburg and Brownfield; sixty in seven years for Paris and Canton/Jay; eighty in seven years for Bethel. The most common requirement was thirty families in six years, as in Otisfield, Rumford, Lovell/Sweden, and Waterford. The most lenient terms, ten families in ten years, were those given to Alexander Shepard, Jr., original owner of what is now the towns of Hebron and Oxford.¹³

Satisfying the settling requirement was not a new problem. It had been especially troublesome in the 1730s, when several York County townships were granted during a lull in the midst of the French and Indian wars. The proprietors of Narragansett No. 1 (now Buxton) needed settlers so badly that in 1736 they offered an inducement of twenty pounds to the first ten settlers who would come there, build a house, and clear four acres of land within two years. That inducement was obviously not enough, for the next year they doubled the offer. The proprietors of New Gloucester offered a similar bounty, but by 1745 they had attracted only twelve families.¹⁴

Although no evidence has been found that the General Court ever re-



Oxford County's rugged terrain, as this early view of Mount Mica and Streaked Mountain shows, was probably one reason why early proprietors had trouble attracting families enough to meet the requirements imposed by the Massachusetts General Court. Illustration from William B. Lapham and Silas P. Maxim, *History of Paris, Maine*, 1884.

scinded or invalidated a grant, the proprietors' actions indicate their fears that it might happen.² The proprietors of several Oxford County townships did seek and received periodic extensions. For example, the General Court granted extensions to New Suncook (Lovell) in 1779 and 1793.¹⁵ In only one Oxford County grant, Fryeburg, was the settling condition easily met, probably because it was settled early, in 1763, on rich farmland. Fryeburg was the only Oxford County grant settled before the Revolution and one of the few where the proprietor himself took up residence in his Maine tract. In this case, before moving to Maine, Fryeburg's proprietor, General Joseph Frye, rather easily solved the settling problem by selling fifty deeds to prospective settlers from his hometown of Andover, Massachusetts.¹⁶

But the proprietors of later grants could not easily satisfy this settling condition, and although they managed to sell a number of their lots, meeting the legislature's deadline was an ongoing problem. Reluctantly, the proprietors were forced to give land away to two groups of settlers: those who would build the roads and mills so essential for establishing a new community, and to those who would actually move in, build a house, and clear land for cultivation. For example, the proprietors of township No. 4, which became the Oxford County town of Paris, were required by settle sixty families within ten years, by 1781. In 1774, three years after the township was granted, they voted a bounty of four pounds to each of the first ten settlers, under the condition that each build a house sixteen feet square and clear ten acres. Six years later the proprietors increased their inducement to eighteen pounds but still complained that the settlement of No. 4 was "greatly retarded by reason of several proprietors neglecting and refusing to dispose of their lands to those that would willingly become settlers." The following year the proprietors, obviously worried about the approaching ten-year deadline, voted to sell the delinquent rights of proprietors who had not fulfilled the settling requirement. Somehow, by 1791, two years before incorporation, Paris included exactly sixty families.¹⁷

THE TOWNSHIP of Otisfield had a similar early history. Founded in 1771, the same year as Paris, Otisfield had only twelve families living there in 1783. Because there are few recorded deeds for this early period, it cannot be stated definitely whether the first twelve families purchased the land directly from the proprietors, but there is no evidence to suggest they did not. One of those twelve was actually headed by

Ebenezer Kemp, a Revolutionary War veteran who according to family tradition, hobbled off the field at Bunker Hill using General Warren's gun as a crutch. We know Kemp owned a hundred acre lot in Otisfield, because he later sold it. The purchase deed was probably never recorded in the Cumberland County Registry which, after all, was in Portland, a forty-mile, two-day trip from Otisfield. Kemp had arrived in Otisfield in 1779. According to town historian William Spurr, he first purchased land in 1782 but left two years later when he sold his hundred acres for 126 pounds and "performing settling duty paid and performed by David Thurston."¹⁸ This language suggests that Kemp left before he had completed the settling duty, and along with the land, he conveyed to Thurston the added responsibility of fulfilling that requirement.

In 1783, two years after the original time limit to settle thirty families, the General Court granted the Otisfield proprietors permission to sell at public auction the lots belonging to those proprietors "being deficient in settling duty." A year later twenty-seven lots of approximately one hundred acres each went to auction. It is helpful to look more closely at the eleven men who acquired this land, either free or for the minimal price of nine shillings per acre. (The total is only eleven because George Peirce, the proprietors' agent and Otisfield's first settler, picked up some sixteen lots at this auction.) Of the eleven men, only eight, including Peirce, settled in Otisfield. These eight early settlers included Joseph Spurr, Jr., who received his allotment "in consideration that the said Spurr do and perform the settling duty."¹⁹ These deeds mention no monetary compensation for the auctioned-off land. Spurr's father, also named Joseph, received an adjacent plot on the same terms. In a real sense, these men received their hundred-acre lots in exchange for their sweat equity—but very little cash if any. Of these eight early settlers, five were Revolutionary War veterans; three were not.

Before 1783, Otisfield was home to only twelve families, eighteen short of the minimum the proprietors needed. With the addition of seven new settlers in 1783, there were nineteen. To these nineteen should be added David Ray, who received his land free the following year in return for building a gristmill. With twenty families in Otisfield in 1784, the proprietors had achieved most of their goal, and the practice of giving away land, some of it by happenstance to Revolutionary War veterans, seems to have reached an end. According to a 1786 letter requesting state tax relief, the population of what was now the plantation of Otisfield had increased to only twenty-two families, still eight short of the requirement. The letter complained that "most of our setlors have movd in

since 1781 (many of them by the Unhappy affects of the late War) or by the Depreciation of paper Money have moved here with Families destitute of almost every necessary of Life.”²⁰ Four years later, however, the first U.S. Census recorded the names of thirty-two heads of household.²¹

Performing the settling duty was the main way a newcomer might obtain virtually free land in Maine, and that land was given to Revolutionary War veterans as well as non-veterans. Because it was an opportunity only briefly available, relatively few settlers were lucky enough to benefit. Performing settling duty was never considered a bounty for military service. Neither was the second, more common way of obtaining Maine land, by simply moving onto the land without the owner’s knowledge or consent, an act usually called “squatting.”

The best description of this process in Maine is Alan Taylor’s *Liberty Men and the Great Proprietors*, which is primarily concerned with the settlement of mid-Maine, or the back country area between the Androscoggin and Penobscot rivers.²² Taylor explains the efforts made by landless people, inspired by the promises of liberty and equality inherent in the American Revolution, to acquire cheap or free land in Maine’s newly opened territories. Their method was simply to move onto a vacant property and begin felling trees and fencing in their homesteads, ignoring the constant demands of the great proprietors for a substantial land payment.

Although squatting was also a problem for most Oxford County proprietors, it did not become a means for acquiring land until after 1785. It was employed especially in Hartford, Sumner, Buckfield, and Woodstock. Before the Committee on Eastern Lands granted these townships, they were still unsurveyed and unlotted, technically “wild land” belonging only to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. But by 1786 a number of individuals, Revolutionary War veterans and non-veterans alike, had already settled there. By law these homesteaders had no legal right to the houses they had built or to the land they had cleared. However, like the land-seeking pioneers in mid-Maine, many believed their rights to the property derived simply from their presence there and from the labor they had expended to clear, build on, and cultivate the land. These early settlers believed, as Taylor has put it, “that real property was fundamentally a material asset—the product of labor applied to improve the previously ‘common’ wilderness.”²³

In July 1786 the Massachusetts General Court passed legislation that went far to resolve a potential conflict between these squatters and the proprietors.²⁴ All the Oxford County grants made after this date included a provision stipulating that any settler who had moved onto the

land, built a house, and cleared some land *before January 1, 1784* would be granted one hundred acres in that new township, at a nominal cost, often two shillings an acre. Exempting the squatter lots from the land granted to the new township's proprietors or owners headed off any future trouble between the proprietors and the settlers. By eliminating any possibility that the squatters might in the future make a common law claim to the land they occupied, the provision in effect validated the proprietors' titles to the remainder of the grant. Further, because the pre-1784 squatters were henceforth considered legal settlers, the provision helped fulfill the proprietors' requirement to settle a certain number of families on the land by a certain date.

This legislation applied to Cumberland and Lincoln Counties but not, unfortunately for them, to the mid-Maine domain of the Great Proprietors. As a result, Oxford County (formed in 1805 out of Cumberland and York) and eastern Maine largely escaped the agrarian unrest that prevailed in mid-Maine. The acres deeded to the former squatters usually had a small charge attached. For example, in 1799 the Committee on Eastern Lands granted a hundred acres to Charles Bisbee, a "yeoman who settled in Township and made improvements therein before the first day of January 1784," for a total of \$7.70. Isaac Bonney, also of Sumner, paid \$7.60 for his hundred acres. In 1789 the General Court clarified what it had meant by settler, stating that an individual on the land before 1784 must have moved there "for the purpose of clearing and cultivating . . . and actually resided on such lot," and he must have cleared at least one acre of land and built a house. Such a settler was to be "quieted in the possession of one hundred acres of land" for the sum of thirty shillings.²⁵

In 1787 the large township of Butterfield, which eventually became Hartford and Sumner, was granted to a group of speculators centered in Dunstable, Massachusetts, for the sum of 4,437 pounds 19 shillings. The deed to this grant is unusual in that it names the individual settlers, all on the land before 1785, each of whom received one hundred acres. Three more men received their hundred acre lots later, also for early settlement, making a total of twenty-one individuals who might be considered the first settlers of Hartford and Sumner. All twenty-one received their land by squatting. Interestingly, Wilbur Libby, in his history of Hartford, names twelve early settlers, each of whom received one hundred acres to which they were "entitled for military service."²⁶ A search through the *Massachusetts Acts and Resolves* and the property deeds for each of the twelve does not substantiate this statement.

Buckfield's first pioneers might also be termed squatters, but only in a

technical sense. About 1776 some men from New Gloucester began moving into the new territory, building homes, clearing and fencing land, and generally behaving like true landowners. Soon, led by Abijah Buck, they began petitioning the General Court for a grant, stating in one request that “they have most of them served their country as soldiers in the present War, and are still ready to risque their Lives for its Defense.”²⁷ The General Court ignored several of these petitions, probably because the Buckfield men were not the type to whom Massachusetts usually granted land. Proprietors of older Oxford County grants were typically merchants, professional men, and land speculators who chose to remain in Massachusetts. The Buckfield men were mainly yeomen farmers whose future lay ahead of them in Maine.

Abijah Buck finally travelled to Boston to make his case in person, and it paid off. In 1788 Massachusetts deeded the township to the forty-seven Buckfield “squatters,” who then became the proprietors of the new township, for the price of two shillings an acre, a bargain even in those days. Of these forty-seven, thirty-two were veterans of the American



The proprietors of most eighteenth-century Massachusetts land grants were required to settle thirty families on their grants in a given period. Each family would have to clear a certain number of acres and build a house at least eighteen feet square and seven foot “stud.” Lapham and Maxim, *History of Paris*.

Revolution, and eight had served in the French and Indian wars. Buckfield historians Alfred Cole and Charles F. Whitman add a note that somewhat confuses our concept of squatters: "There were a number in the township who had come in after January 1, 1784, and before the purchase was effected. These were treated by the proprietors as mere squatters and trespassers and some of them were driven away without much concern."²⁸

OBVIOUSLY, JUST when a township was granted and settled made a crucial difference in how one might obtain free land. In such townships as Otisfield, Paris, and Waterford, all granted before the war, a relatively few individuals received free land—or land at a very low cost. In these early grants, one might obtain free or cheap land by performing the necessary settling duty, an opportunity that lasted only until the proprietors had fulfilled their legislative requirement to place a certain number of families on their land. In July 1786 the situation changed. After that date, any individual who had settled before January 1, 1784 on land he did not own was almost guaranteed a lot of one hundred acres. The dates mattered a good deal; one's military service not at all.

Free land for Massachusetts veterans in more remote parts of Maine continued to be an issue. In 1791, eight years after the formal end of the Revolution, Massachusetts again considered giving a tract of Maine land as a bonus to veterans with at least three years' service. This legislation was not enacted. In 1801 Massachusetts finally passed a blanket resolve to give each Revolutionary soldier with three years' service a bounty of either twenty dollars or 200 acres on the upper Schoodic River, distantly located in what is now Washington County. Massachusetts increased the cash award to \$50 in 1833. The veterans, or their widows or children, could not receive the bounty land until enough applicants applied (usually one hundred) who were "sufficient to take up a quantity of land that shall be equal to one Township of six miles square." The Commonwealth eventually granted four bounty townships in inaccessible and remote areas of northern and eastern Maine.²⁹

Three of these four bounty tracts remain today unincorporated plantations in Aroostook County, known only by a number. One was formerly called "Soldiertown." Only one of the four, now Mars Hill, attracted more than a handful of settlers. One obvious reason the veterans were reluctant to respond to this free land bonanza was that in 1801, when the offer was first made, the average veteran was more than fifty

years old. Between 1805 and 1828 Massachusetts repeatedly extended the three-year limit for applying. By 1828, all but eleven of the 115 lots in Mars Hill were laid out, but, probably because the township still had no settlers at all, the commonwealth removed all settling conditions. Historian Sara J. Cowan's analysis shows that of the 115 lots, only fifty-four were deeded to soldiers or their heirs. Of these fifty-four, some thirty-three were "lost for taxes" and sold by the state treasurer. Seventeen more of the 115 were soon sold by the soldiers or their heirs. None of the old soldiers settled in Mars Hill or in any of the other new bounty lands. After the Commonwealth removed the settling conditions from Mars Hill, a land dealer named Jeremiah Trueworthy purchased the entire township. Not until 1845 did the first settlers trickle in. Cowan concluded that "most of the benefits were derived by alert lumbermen and their agents" who capitalized on an opportunity to buy good timberland at bargain prices.³⁰

Even when Maine became a state, the idea that the Revolutionary War veterans should be rewarded with land persisted. When Maine separated from Massachusetts in 1820, Massachusetts retained title to half the public lands in Maine. Consequently, Massachusetts could still bestow Maine land as a bounty to its veterans. However, in 1833 Massachusetts declared that residents of Maine could no longer apply for its bounty land. The Maine legislature then responded to moral pressure to reward its own veterans who were denied the Massachusetts bounty when Maine became a state.³¹ The legislators declared that giving land to veterans would also promote "the settlement of our vacant territory at some very important points, at the same time that we are performing an act of justice which has already been too long delayed."³² Therefore, between 1835 and 1838 Maine passed a series of resolves granting two hundred acres of land to its Revolutionary War veterans, their widows, or their immediate heirs; in 1838 the acreage was increased to 600 acres. Approximately six townships were allocated as veterans' bonus lands.³³

Despite the idealistic tone of the Maine legislation, once again it proved an ineffective way either to reward the veterans or to settle the state's wild lands. By 1838, after all, most of the surviving Revolutionary War veterans were more than eighty years old, and the new tracts were located in a distant and remote part of the state. This, however, was a boom time for timberland sales. As Sara Cowan states, "from the first the Maine bounty resolves made no pretense of being anything but an investment in timberland. For the moment it was cheaper for the state to give the Revolutionary soldiers and their widows two hundred acres of

Settling Oxford County

land than \$50 in money.” After analyzing all the grants made, she concludes that the Maine bounty resolves did give a total of 511 elderly people a sum of money. She discovered, however, that “not one lot of the ten townships appropriated by Massachusetts and Maine for service in the Massachusetts line . . . was settled by the soldier who drew the lot or in whose name the lot was drawn; and few lots were settled at all.”³⁴

SO IT seems that the tradition of Ebenezer Kemp and other Massachusetts soldiers moving to Maine to settle on land received for Revolutionary War service holds true neither for Oxford County nor for anywhere else in the state. Yet the myth persists, for two reasons. First, it is an appealing story, even if the facts do not add up. We still want to reward the soldiers who brought forth our new nation, and we are willing to do it posthumously. The General Court of Massachusetts had similarly noble intentions towards its veterans when, in the 1730s, they granted large quantities of land for a military expedition completed some forty-five years earlier. And in the 1770s, when the legislators made a new series of grants to compensate for their earlier error of locating the grants in New Hampshire, Massachusetts ostensibly was still seeking a just reward for the veterans of 1690. The Commonwealth continued to make gestures of compensation even after it became obvious that those gestures conflicted with more practical concerns like replenishing the state treasury. When Massachusetts in 1801 and Maine in 1833 belatedly made grants of free land to its Revolutionary War veterans, they continued to employ the same patriotic language, extolling “those citizens, whose meritorious services in the field so essentially contributed to establish our Independence.”³⁵ Language like this may have encouraged legislators to believe that, although they had acted late and half-heartedly, it was deserving veterans, not land speculators, who would benefit from their legislative largesse.

A second reason for the persistence of the myth involves the complexities of the process of forming and settling in the new grants. The difficulties the proprietors of most Oxford County townships had in attracting new families were doubtless replicated elsewhere in Maine. The fact that a number of the first settlers received land free for performing settling duty, coupled with a second fact that many of these first settlers were veterans, has been misunderstood and reduced to a simpler, but incorrect, cause and effect: free land for military service. Likewise, it is often forgotten that many of the first settlers in the Oxford County grants

made after 1785 actually gained title to their land because the legislature wished to “quiet” their claims—that is, to solve the problem of squatters. The history of the granting and settlement of Oxford County should remind us that the lawmakers of Massachusetts and Maine, the proprietors of the new townships, and the men and women who moved there were all complex individuals with complex motives that merit our full understanding. To accept the Revolutionary War bounty myth is to misinterpret their records and, finally, to read history wrong.

NOTES

1. Nellie Pottle Hankins, “The People of Pugleyville,” unpublished and undated essay [c. 1945], in Otisfield Historical Society Archives (Nellie Hankins was the mother-in-law of the author of this essay); William B. Lapham, *The History of Norway* (1886; reprinted New England Historic Press and Norway Historical Society, 1986), p. 7; Howard C. Reiche, Jr. and Hugh G. Chapman, *The Smile of Providence: A History of Gilead, Maine* (Falmouth, ME: Long Point Press, 2004), p. 8.
2. As of 2004 Oxford County had 34 towns, two plantations, and nineteen unorganized townships. The number has fluctuated over the years. For instance, West Paris split off from Paris in 1957; Otisfield “seceded” from Cumberland Co. in 1978 and joined Oxford. Other county towns have surrendered their incorporation status.
3. Charles E. Clark, *The Eastern Frontier: The Settlement of Northern New England, 1610-1763* (New York: Knopf, 1970), pp. 176-179, 181.
4. Ernest H. Knight, *The Origin and History of Raymondtown* (Norway, ME: the author, 1974), pp. 15, 25-27.
5. Massachusetts, *Acts and Resolves of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: Reprinted by Wright and Potter, 1890-98), February 5, 1774, Chap. 89 (hereafter cited as *Mass. Acts & Resolves*); *History of Waterford* (Portland: the town, 1879); Knight, *Raymondtown*, p. 19.
6. Knight, *Raymondtown*, pp. 25-27.
7. For Bethel, see *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, June 9, 1768, Chap. 26. For Canton and Jay, see *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, June 1, 1771, Chap. 11; for Otisfield, June 25, 1771, Chap. 22; for Waterford, February 24, 1774, Chap. 121.
8. For Brownfield, see William Teg, *History of Brownfield, Maine* (Cornish: Carbrook Press, 1966); for Fryeburg, see John S. Barrows, *Fryeburg, Maine: An Historical Sketch* (Fryeburg: Pequawket Press, 1938).
9. *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, June 9, 1779, Chap. 75; Sara J. Cowan, “Revolutionary Bounty Lands in Maine,” unpublished M.A. Thesis, Columbia University, 1954, pp. 1, 16 (copy at Maine State Library); *History of Wilson’s Mills, Maine, and the*

Magalloway Settlements (Wilson's Mills: the town, 1975), p. 1; Ronald F. Banks, *A History of Maine: A Collection of Readings on the History of Maine, 1600-1970* (Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1964), p. 131; Lawrence D. Bridgham, "Maine Public Lands, 1781-1795: Claims, Trespassers, and Sales," Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University, 1959, pp. 24, 79, 286. An 1821 report by G. W. Coffin to the Massachusetts General Court, gives the amount of land sold as 3,600,000 acres granted by 1795 and including the Bingham purchase of 1791. See "Lands Sold, Report to the Massachusetts Legislative Committee," in Maine State Archives, Land Office Records, Box 4, Folder 1 (hereafter cited as Coffin Report).

10. Bridgham, *Maine Public Lands*, pp. 331-334; Stanley B. Attwood, *The Length and Breadth of Maine* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1974; reprint 2004), p. 30; Larry E. Glatz, communication of March 25, 2004; *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, February 28, 1793, February 28, 1797, and February 27, 1797. Information on Fryeburg Academy is from Randall Bennett, *Oxford County, Maine: A Guide to Its Historic Architecture* (Bethel: Oxford County Historic Resource Survey, 1984), p. 437.

11. Charles E. Clark et als., eds., *Maine in the Early Republic* (Hanover, N.H.: Maine Historical Society, Maine Humanities Council, University Press of New England, 1988), pp. 2, 15; William S. Spurr, *History of Otisfield, Maine* (Otisfield: the author, 1950?); Alfred Cole and Charles F. Whitman, *A History of Buckfield* (Buckfield: the authors, 1915), p. 50. *History of Waterford*, p. 37.

12. The best discussion of the proprietor system is Roy H. Akagi, *The Town Proprietors of the New England Colonies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1924). For his comments on the settlement problem, see p. 209.

13. All these provisions can be found in *Mass. Acts & Resolves*. For Fryeburg, see March 3, 1762, Chap. 404; for Brownfield, June 6, 1764, Chap. 223; for Bethel, June 9, 1768, Chap. 26; for Canton/Jay, June 11, 1771, Chap. 11; for Paris, June 11, 1771, Chap. 12; for Otisfield, June 25, 1771, Chap. 22; for Rumford, February 3, 1774, Chap. 77; for Lovell/Sweden, February 5, 1774, Chap. 89; for Waterford, February 23, 1774, Chap. 121. This last grant was unusual. The General Court made the grant to Shepard, a surveyor from Newton, Massachusetts, in return for his producing within a year "an accurate map of all the late Province of Maine, . . . distinguishing the appropriated from the unappropriated lands." See Marquis P. King, *Annals of Oxford* (reprint: Somersworth, NH: New England History Press, 1987), p. 2.

14. Clark, *Eastern Frontier*, p. 190.

15. The General Court may have required the proprietors to submit a list of their settlers. The Coffin Report of March 12, 1821, submitted to the Committee on Eastern Lands, includes a notation of the number of settlers in the new townships in Maine. See Akagi, *Town Proprietors*, pp. 219-220; Lovell Proprietors Records, 3 (April 13, 1779, May 1793), p. 26 (bound typescript in Fryeburg Registry of Deeds).

16. Barrows, *Fryeburg, Maine*, pp. 30-31.

17. Paris, Proprietors Records, transcribed typescript, loose sheets in possession

of Ben Conant of South Paris, Maine. See also William B. Lapham and Silas P. Maxim, *History of Paris, Maine* (Paris: the authors, 1884), pp. 40-41, 45.

18. Spurr, *History of Otisfield*, pp. 10, 443; Cumberland County Registry of Deeds, 27: 379, November 19, 1784.

19. Spurr, *History of Otisfield* (It is possible the settlers performed the settling duty after they arrived but before they got the deed. William Spurr, author of *History of Otisfield*, pp. 589-90, states that his ancestor, Joseph Spurr, settled on Lot 16 where he had lived continuously since 1779, but that he did not buy this lot until the 1783 auction.); Cumberland County Deeds, 13:378-379; see also Spurr, *History of Otisfield*, pp. 26.

20. Letter from David Ray and others to the Massachusetts General Court, June 8, 1786, in James P. Baxter, *Documentary History of the State of Maine*, 22: 322-323.

21. Spurr, *History of Otisfield*, p. 159.

22. Alan Taylor, *Liberty Men and the Great Proprietors: The Revolutionary Settlement on the Maine Frontier, 1760-1820* (Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, and the University of North Carolina Press, 1990).

23. Taylor, *Liberty Men*, p. 25.

24. *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, July 8, 1786, Chap. 130; Banks, *History of Maine*, p. 133; Bridgham, *Maine Public Lands*, pp. 178-179.

25. Taylor, *Liberty Men*, p. 25; Cumberland County Deeds, 32: 101, and 39: 217, June 14, 1799; *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, June 25, 1789.

26. Wilbur Libby, *Hartford, Maine* (n.p.: the author, 1985), pp. 12-14.

27. Cole and Whitman, *History of Buckfield*, pp. 49-50.

28. Cole and Whitman, *History of Buckfield*, p. 61.

29. About this time Massachusetts did make some land grants to individual Revolutionary War veterans, though almost certainly not because of their military record. For instance, in 1791, veteran Alexander Campbell received 2,000 acres of Maine land. In addition to serving in the Revolution, he had been employed by the Commonwealth. See Bridgham, *Maine Public Lands*, p. 333; Banks, *History of Maine*, p. 134. *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, March 5, 1801, Chap. 139; Cowan, "Revolutionary Bounty Lands," pp. 20, 22.

30. Cowan, "Revolutionary Bounty Lands," p. 18; Gladys S. Tweedie, *Mars Hill: Typical Aroostook Town* (the author, 1952), p. 35; Cowan, "Revolutionary Bounty Lands," pp. 23, 44.

31. James S. Leamon, et als., "Separation and Statehood," in *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to Present*, ed. Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill, and Joel W. Eastman (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1995), p. 184. The text of the "Articles of Separation" is in Ronald F. Banks, *Maine Becomes a State: The Movement to Separate Maine from Massachusetts, 1785-1820* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1970), Appendix, pp. xiv; *ibid.*, p. 271; Cowan, "Revolutionary Bounty Lands," p. 31; *Dubros Times: Selected Depositions of Maine Revolutionary War Veterans*, ed. Sylvia J. Sherman (Augusta: Maine State Archives, 1975), pp. v, vii, viii.

32. *Dubros Times*, p. viii.
33. Cowan, "Revolutionary Bounty Lands," pp. 33-35.
34. Cowan, "Revolutionary Bounty Lands," pp. 40, 44.
35. *Mass. Acts & Resolves*, March 5, 1801, Chap. 139.