

2019

History of Hope Maine

Town of Hope

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Hope, Town of, "History of Hope Maine" (2019). *Maine History Documents*. 205.
<https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistory/205>

This Other is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History Documents by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Hope *Maine*

[Home](#)[About Hope](#)[Calendar](#)[Schools](#)[Hope Library](#)[Hope Historical Society](#)[Online Services Available](#)[Town Office](#)[2019 Town Meetings and Election Information](#)[Board of Selectmen](#)[Other Boards and Committees](#)[Planning Board](#)[Town Services](#)[Finances](#)[How Do I...?](#)

Hope History

The first Europeans settled in Hope in the 1780s, but Europeans had been frequenting the Maine coast for at least 180 years before that. Captain John Smith and others report on Hope's most important historical event -- the 1615-17 war in which the east Penobscot Bay Tarratines threw off the dominance of the Pemaquid Wawenocks. According to Hope tradition, the peace treaty by which these nations literally buried the hatchet took place on the northeast slope of Hatchet Mountain near Hope Corner. From this historic event, however, we should not over-estimate the Indian population of Hope. It probably averaged 10 in winter, when Indians camped here to hunt deer and bear, and zero in summer, when they left for the shore and its fish and shellfish. Despite their low numbers, the Indians thinned the forest primeval, burning it to increase the game population.

Charles Barrett of New Ipswich, NH, was Hope's developer. In 1785, he contracted with the Proprietors, a group of Boston businessmen and lawyers who had gained title through the Council of Plymouth from the King of England. As his part of the contract, Barrett promised to recruit 45 settlers within 3 years, build a meeting house and "all necessary roads." He had Hope surveyed (31.5 square miles then, which included the best part of Appleton), and laid out 120 lots of 160-168 acres each. Barrett got 80 lots; the Proprietors got 40.

Barrett's enticement to settlers was to give 100 acres in return for clearing 3 acres within 3 years. He hoped they would buy the other 60-68 acres; some did.

Prior to their contract with Barrett, the Proprietors had given a few families permission to settle their still-unsurveyed lands in Hope. The first known European settlers of Hope were the Hilts from Rutland , MA -- probably Germans with ties to Waldoboro and the Camden Ott family. About 1782, they settled

Assessing and Property Taxes ▶

Tax Maps and Other Maps

Ordinances

Policies

Town Reports

Arts and Recreation

Business Directory

Privacy Policy

on the early land above Lake Megunticook where the Pearse's [Rocky Top dairy farm](#) is now. Barrett's first settlers arrived in 1786.

Barrett exceeded his goal and, by the 1790 census, there were 53 households in Hope and 173 people. Most came from New Hampshire and Massachusetts . Hope had been laid out as an expansion of Camden , with the town center at [Hope Corner](#), but demand for lots in the hilly land, not connected to the coast by any major stream, was weak.

The most prosperous part of town was along the St. George's River which supplied water to two of the town's three main grist and lumber mills: McLain's (Appleton Village) and Smith's (North Appleton). ([Hart's](#) in South Hope at the foot of Fish Pond was the third.) These centers were a long walk over rough, hilly trails from Hope Corner. To help his settlers, Barrett tried to build a canal up the St. George's River . The project was unsuccessful, even when General Knox took it over. Settlers mainly moved themselves and their goods to and from the outside world on foot or on horseback. "Roads" were mere trails. Wherever possible, heavy goods were moved using the "winter roads" -- frozen brooks and streams to the Megunticook River and Camden or via the St. George's River to Warren . In Spring and Fall mud season, Hope was quite isolated.

Greed delayed Hope's incorporation from 1795 until 1804. Townspeople wanted incorporation so they could tax land to support schools and a cemetery. A good part of the land, however, still belonged to the Proprietors, who had never sold many of their 40 lots and who didn't wish to pay taxes. The Proprietors repeatedly opposed Hope's petitions for incorporation in the Boston legislature, successfully until 1804.

Starting in 1800, the more prosperous settlers along the St. George's River began petitioning to be allowed to separate from Hope. In 1843, after many attempts and despite protracted opposition from the rest of the town, the legislature formed one-third of Hope (containing half its valuation) and the areas to its northwest into Appleton .

Hope's loss of its richest third makes it difficult to estimate the pre-1850 population of today's 21-square-mile Hope. By all estimates, Hope's population peaked at 1107 in 1850, declined thereafter until 1920, stagnated until 1970, then began to rise rapidly.

Farming was the backbone of Hope's economy until recently, although at the peak there were not more than 150 farms. These early Hope farms were self-sufficient to an extent we can hardly imagine, each supporting a family that was often "extended," including three generations and married brothers.

Most of the non-farmers supported the farm economy as sawyers, stave & barrel makers, coopers, smiths, cabinet makers, merchants, wheel wrights, shoemakers, as well as preachers and teachers. Farmers performed as many of these specialized tasks as they could themselves, especially barrel making in winter months. Other families lived by laboring on the farms of others or by working out of Hope, e.g. as merchant seamen.

Hope's timber had little value on the stump once the cost of getting it to market was deducted. Nevertheless, exploiting the woods was something farmers could do in the lean winter months, hauling by the "winter roads" to the coastal towns, where the lime industry provided a market for firewood and for the casks Hope produced. By the late 1800s, Hope's woods were largely gone. Rockport and Rockland were importing firewood from Nova Scotia by ship. From the top of Hatchet Mountain, no woods could be seen. Most land was not de-stoned and farmed, so it was used as pasture.

The wood market delayed the decline. However, after 1850, enough people were leaving that population began to fall. Remote farms, farms on northwest slopes, and farms on bottom land that was not "early" (did not drain for early Spring plowing) were abandoned first, as were the few farms operated by renters rather than owners. The process was accelerated by the Civil War, in which many Hope men served and died. Many survivors took opportunities elsewhere. As the flatter, more fertile Midwest opened to farming, lower prices squeezed New England. As Hope's farms were abandoned or became harder pressed, so were the artisans and others who supported those farms. From 1860 Hope lost population at the rate of 1% or 2% a year, reaching a low of 424 in 1920.

Alford Lake Girls Camp, one of America's oldest, was founded in Hope in 1907 and is still thriving. By the 1920s, when more summer camps were established on Hope's ponds and summer people started to rent and build their cottages, pastures and plow fields were reverting to woods. Hope was a rural backwater. When P.A. Jones's Hatchet Mountain Camp challenged the town boys to a baseball game, as Ed True recalls, the town boys hardly knew how to play and were no match for the sophisticated campers. How different it would be today! The [True cannery](#) at the Corner struggled on until the 1930s.

In the 1930s roads were still not paved but there were more cars and shared rides; the stages that had linked Hope to Camden, North Appleton and Union -- Hope's first and last public transportation -- disappeared. A generation of young men went to fight World War II. More townspeople worked in Camden's woolen mills or shipyard. But the end of the war did not bring a renaissance. Hope's struggling agriculture was helped by the short-lived boom in poultry-raising for the Belfast plants, first by converting abandoned barns to hen houses, then by building modern poultry barns. As competition from the South intensified, that industry died. Only a few farm families were resourceful enough and cussedly hardworking enough to survive, usually by specializing in dairy, poultry, apples, blueberries, Christmas trees or fresh vegetables.

It is this Hope of declining population and hard-pressed farms that today's old timers remember and many of us look back to with nostalgia. Hope's remarkable resurgence carries with it the spirit of the Hope of harder days, and demonstrates a vitality of which we can all be proud. How important it is that we should all understand Hope's history! By understanding, we can go on building a community that values its heritage, and uses its heritage to plan well and wisely for the future.

[Home](#) | [About Hope](#) | [Calendar](#) | [Schools](#) | [Hope Library](#) | [Hope Historical Society](#) | [Online Services Available](#) | [Town Office](#)
[2019 Town Meetings and Election Information](#) | [Board of Selectmen](#) | [Other Boards and Committees](#) | [Planning Board](#) | [Town Services](#) | [Finances](#)
[How Do I...?](#) | [Assessing and Property Taxes](#) | [Tax Maps and Other Maps](#) | [Ordinances](#) | [Policies](#) | [Town Reports](#) | [Arts and Recreation](#)
[Business Directory](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

[powered by GovOffice.com](#)

[Printer-friendly Version](#)