

### III.

#### Building a Town in the Wilderness.

The spring of 1727 found plenty of activity in Pennycook Plantation. Work on the cartway, interrupted by the winter season, neared completion and the walls of the block house so essential to the safety of a frontier settlement, rose day by day as men set the logs into place.

In May, Richard Hazzen of Haverhill came again to Pennycook and surveyed the remainder of the west side intervale and a part of that on the east side of the river. Tradition tells that he destroyed the map of this survey because of misunderstanding about the pay for his work. At any rate this map has not been found and today, because of changes in the course of the river, many of the <sup>former</sup> lots are lost to identification.

The west side lots were on a Range laid out at Rattlesnake Plain which extended from Farnum's Eddy (directly east of the railroad crossing near the State Prison) northerly. A second Range was laid out at Frog Ponds, east of the southern end of the new village street. On the east side of the river two Ranges were laid out on Mill Brook intervale - the site of present East Concord village - another at Sugar Ball Plain and the last at Lowest Intervale, opposite Eleven Lots. These farming lands were apportioned to the Proprietors. (See Map, Chapter II.)

Hazzen testified in later years that while making this survey, he observed that about half of the Proprietors or their substitutes, were working in Pennycook, clearing and fencing their lots as required by the grant of the Plantation. He was especially impressed with the zeal of Ebenezer Eastman who spent the entire period of Hazzen's stay in "laying out lands" while others came for only brief periods of work. Hazzen observed some plowing in process on the intervale in order that crops might be raised during the summer. Tradition says that Samuel Ayer, a lusty youth from Haverhill, plowed the first field in the Plantation. Perhaps he was identical with the "Samuel Ayres" who at the age of eighteen, drove a team of

six or more yoke of oxen over the road to Pennycook, bringing a barrel of pork from Haverhill to the busy men at the Plantation.

Already the settlers had come to dread the steep descent at Sugar Ball and on this trip, young Ayer devised a scheme for the safe passage of his load. He took off all but one yoke of oxen and, after cutting and trimming a pine tree, he fastened the stump with its stubby limbs to the rear of the cart. By means of this brake, he arrived in safety at the foot of the incline and swam his oxen across the river. He landed at the foot of Ferry St. called then, Hale's Point for Joseph Hale whose home lot lay there. Unfortunately Samuel Ayer lost one of his oxen by drowning.

There was a Proprietor by the name of Samuel Ayer, identical, probably, with Samuel Aires who signed the 1721 petition. Young Samuel was doubtless a relative—perhaps a son acting as agent for his elder. The Proprietor of this name had an excellent record at the end of the three year limit, but he could not have settled in Pennycook for long as his name does not appear again. Fifty years later, however, his son Richard Ayer, came to Concord and proved himself a most estimable citizen. Three of his sisters married young men of the town, John Bradley, John Kimball and Dr. Peter Green.

The month of May, 1727, brought an untoward event for Pennycook Plantation when the government of New Hampshire, apparently without any survey, declared a grant of nine miles square to be called Bow. This area covered two-thirds or more of Pennycook and infringed upon the Massachusetts grants of Hopkinton and Suncok. When news of this became known in our settlement, the Proprietors had already invested money and labor they could ill afford to lose. Trusting in the validity of their claim, they stood their ground, only to be plagued for years to come.

A splendid forest covered most of the area of the Plantation, but it proved a liability rather than an asset to the settlers. Woodland was a menace since it sheltered wolves and savages alike, and from <sup>its</sup> ~~their~~

depths the poisonous rattlesnake sought the sun. One of the first measures for general protection passed by the Proprietors, was a vote for a bounty on the tails of this dread enemy. In clearing his land, the pioneer found the process of felling trees and chopping them into lengths for burning, to be a tedious and back-breaking task, and so he often "limbed down" his trees after they fell, leaving the brush to dry and be burned off where it lay. Then he cut and piled his logs with less labor. Often he cut his logs by fire instead of with his axe. If the wind were brisk he could lay a dry stick across the tree trunk, set fire to it and let it burn until the log fell apart. Cutting by fire made it possible for a man to do double the work possible with axe alone, in a given time.

When the logs were ready they were hauled by oxen to the place where they might be needed for building, but since there was a heavy surplus of logs, they were often burned with profit. The ashes were left for the rains to "neutralize" and then grain might be harrowed in without plowing. When the second season arrived grass seed could be sown and a plentiful crop was usual. \*

During the summer of 1726, some of the "old Intervale grasses" which grew wild on the low, sandy soil near the river, had been cut and stacked. This hay fed the horses of the settlers who were working in the early spring of 1727. More hay was cut during this season and corn was planted and harvested on the Intervale fields, so that men might live at the Plantation during the coming winter.

It was during this cutting of some of this intervale grass that the traditional encounter took place between Ebenezer Eastman and Wattanummon. Capt. Eastman had been assigned one of the lots in that bend of the river called then and now, "The Fan". It was within view of the chief's tepee and when the Captain began to mow, Wattanummon jumped into action. Seizing his gun, he called his two sons and all three savages hurried to the field. Gun to shoulder, the chief shouted—"My land; my grass! No cut,

\* Abbot Genealogical Register.

no cut! "Capt. Eastman was a man of courage; he was also a man of discretion, so, without hesitation, he dropped his scythe and walked over to the excited Indians, inviting a parley.

White men and red sat down comfortably under a tree and Eastman and his helpers produced their lunch and their jug and shared with the Indians. Under the influence of such potent friendliness, Wattanummon waxed generous and agreed to let the party cut grass unhindered. When Eastman was assigned one of the new lots on Mill Brook Intervale on the east side of the river, he decided to leave his log house a little south of present Franklin St. and settled permanently on his new lot. There he lived near neighbor to Wattanummon and nothing seems to have disturbed their friendly relations.

Capt. Ebenezer Eastman was a man of experience beyond that of most of the younger settlers who were largely sons, nephews or young agents of the mature Proprietors. He came to Pennycook when he was somewhat under forty years of age and immediately proved natural leader in the town. His oldest son was sixteen and ready to do a man's work and he had an efficient helper in the person of Jacob Shute. When the three year limit had expired, Eastman's house lot and his home lot were in the best order of any in the Plantation and he had more land under cultivation than any other settler.

When he was a little lad, the Eastman home in Haverhill was destroyed by Indians and from then on, Ebenezer learned to face danger and to live valiantly. When a youth of nineteen, he joined the expedition against Port Royal in Queen Anne's War and three years later, 1711 he was captain of a company of infantry which sailed from Boston with the fleet sent from England under Admiral Sir Hovenden Walker, for the campaign against the French in Canada. As the ships sailed into the St. Lawrence river, a violent storm arose and, since night was falling, orders were issued that each transport should follow the light on the mast

head of the Admiral's ship.

Capt. Eastman had sailed the St. Lawrence on a previous visit to Canada and he watched the ship's course with some uneasiness of mind. When, in the darkness he observed that the signal light disappeared and then re-appeared, he knew that a rocky and dangerous point had intervened. He went at once to the commander of his ship and explained the danger, but the man who was in his cups, refused to alter his straight course saying in bravado, "I'll follow my Admiral if he goes to hell!" "Very well", replied the youthful captain of Colonial troops, to the captain of Her Majesty's navy, "I have no intention of going there, and if you won't alter the course of the vessel, I will." Leaving the commander spluttering threats, Eastman rallied the men of his company and with their aid, ordered the commander below and forced the helmsman to change the course. The transport rounded the rocks in safety, but dawn revealed the tragedy of eight or nine other ships wrecked and a thousand men drowned.

With daylight, the commander sobered by the news, had the grace to apologize on his knees to the insubordinate young Colonial, but Admiral Walker in chagrin, could not be so generous. Coming on board to inquire how it was that one transport escaped the tragedy, he faced Capt. Eastman with the question-"Capt. Eastman, where were you when the fleet was cast away?" Even so serious an occasion could not subdue the humor characteristic of this forthright young man and his quiet reply was ironical-"Following my Admiral." "Following your Admiral", shouted the head of the lost fleet, "You Yankees are a pack of praying devils-you saved yourselves but sent my men to hell!"

A man who, at the age of twenty-two, could be so cool, so daring, so resourceful, was, at forty, the ideal pioneer type and we find that Bouton rated him "the strong man" of the new settlement. Unlike most of the other settlers, Capt. Eastman is not recorded as a member of the church in Pennycook. Nevertheless he and his six sons were reverent men whose

character was an asset to the new settlement throughout coming years.

Capt. Eastman had a home ready for his family in the fall of 1727 and tradition tells that the oxcart drawn by six yoke of oxen and laden with the family feather beds, pots, pans and essential furnishings for that home, was the first to travel over the route from Haverhill, and that this family was the first to make a permanent home in Pennycook. The Eastman ox cart was driven by Jacob Shute, the one alien among the Puritan settlers of the Plantation.

Shute was the son of a French Huguenot who had fled to Ireland for refuge. Apprenticed to a stocking weaver in Dublin while still a boy, Jacob disliked his work and, with another lad, ran away and crossed the Atlantic as a stowaway. The ship docked at Newburyport and the boys were obliged to sell their services to pay for the stolen passage. Jacob was fortunate in his master who was none other than Capt. Eastman, and after his release at the age of twenty-one, he chose to continue in the Captain's employ. Thus he became one of Pennycook's pioneers and ultimately a land owner and the founder of one of the substantial families of the town. There is a record that even in old age, he still retained his French accent.

Very soon after the Eastmans arrived, young Edward Abbot and his wife, Dorcas Chandler, came to Pennycook. A cousin of Proprietor Nathaniel Abbot, he became a Proprietor himself by purchase of a share and settled on his house lot on the north corner of the reserved highway known as Centre road (Centre St. of today). His home was<sup>a</sup> a substantial log house wherein Mrs. Abbot gave birth on Feb. 15, 1728 to their first child, little Dorcas. The record shows no other women living in Concord that winter except Mrs. Eastman, Mrs. Abbot and probably Mrs. Shute. There was no doctor within reach of the settlement when this first white child was born in our town.

On Montgomery St. stands the old building which was originally on

on the corner of the main street and there is evidence that it is at least a part of the old house in which Dorcas Abbot was born. If this be so, it is the oldest building now standing in Concord. The second story bears its own evidence of age, especially in the small windows on its south side and it seems credible that the tradition is trustworthy to the effect that this second story is the house built by young Edward Abbot for his bride in the year 1727. Abbot increased his holdings until he owned a prosperous farm which extended west along Centre road to the vicinity of our White's Park. He was prominent in the new town's affairs and served on its first Board of Selectmen

By the fall of 1727 the block house stood completed on the west side of the village street and near the foot of present Chapel St. It was a haven for the little group of pioneers who were to spend the coming winter in Pennycook. It was crude, to be sure, with no other floor than the hard trodden earth, but it provided a common gathering place and refuge and it was a tangible accomplishment giving promise of the town to be. Canoes had been built for use in crossing the river and a section of the long fence for protection of the cultivated fields on the intervale, had reached completion.

The Proprietors continued to hold their meetings in Essex County since most of them retained their homes there, making only summer trips to Pennycook. In March 1728, it was voted to provide for preaching in the new block house beginning May 15. The committee appointed was directed "to act with all prudence, and not to assure the gentleman more than after the rate of one hundred pounds per annum for his services." The mounting expense involved in building this town in the wilderness and the limited financial resources of the Proprietors made caution necessary.

The 15th of May was the opening of the 1728 season in our town for it was the date set for the first meeting of the Proprietors to be

held in the Plantation. The group assembled in the block house and very likely it was the first visit to Pennycook of the more elderly of these fathers of the enterprise. Certainly it was a day of rejoicing, especially for those men who had long hoped for the fulfillment of their dream.

This was the date set for regular preaching to begin and Rev. Enoch Coffin, Proprietor, seems to have been the choice of the committee. Mr. Coffin was then thirty-two years old, a native of Newburyport and a graduate of Harvard College. His service as preacher was brief for in August of that year he died. His successor appears to have been Rev. Bezaleel Toppan, son of a Proprietor and later a Proprietor in his own right. Like Mr. Coffin, he was a Harvard graduate (1722) and his house lot was on the west side of the village street near present Pearl St. He did not stay long in Pennycook for he returned to Essex County as the settled minister at Salem.

There was important business transacted in the block house at the May meeting-provision for a grist mill and a saw mill for the settlement. The need was pressing and a bounty was voted to encourage each enterprise. Each builder would receive fifty pounds and the water site and privilege of the mill so long as he properly maintained it, with a further bonus of fifty acres of land. Should the mill when built be "providentially consumed" the bargain would still hold good. Nathan Simonds, a Proprietor, took over both mill privileges but the record shows that Ebenezer Eastman "paid the charge of building the corn mill" which, with the fact that this grist mill was certainly his property at a later date, indicates that he may have been its first owner.

The water power in the brook on the east side of the river was entirely practical for these mills although the location was inconvenient for use by the villagers on the west side. This brook which drains Turtle pond and winds through East village today, was then an abundant

stream with ample fall. The grist mill was built on the site of the Cate mill on Mill St and stones for grinding were found on top of Rattlesnake hill where "the old Roby quarry of later years was opened. About half a mile up-stream from the grist mill, the first saw mill was built and before winter set in it was in operation. This made possible a needed improvement in the block house and in January 1729 the Proprietors voted that a plank floor be laid, to the great comfort of all who gathered there.

Quite properly the brook across the river became known as ~~Mill~~ Mill brook. The saw mill thereon had difficulties soon after it started when the mill crank brought on horseback from Haverhill, suddenly broke. As yet there was no blacksmith in Pennycook but necessity as always, was again "the mother of invention." A settler who had been helper in a smithy, volunteered for the task of mending the crank. With beetle rings and wedges he fastened the parts together and then welded them in a hot fire of pitch pine knots. So successful was the result that the crank was used for years to come.

The trip made by the Proprietors to Pennycook in the spring of 1728 was productive of benefit to the town. The fearsome descent of the hill at Sugar Ball and the clumsy canoes for the ferry showed them the need for more suitable access to the town. At the meeting in the block house there was serious discussion of the problem and a vote was taken that a ferry should be opened near the south end of the village street and that "ferrage rates" for man and beast be established. The first official ferryman, John Merrill, was not appointed until the following year.

The crossing place between Sugar Ball and Hale's Point was the earliest in use and a private ferry was maintained there by the Kimball family for a century to come and discontinued only when freshets swept away Hale's Point, the landing place on the west bank of the river. A second ferry in very early use was that "against Wattanummon's Field".

In 1729 Capt. Ebenezer Eastman leased the Sewall Farm of five hundred acres on the east side and near his latest grant of land whereon he established his home. Because of this fact and because his "corn mill" near by was, as yet, the only grist mill in town, he needs must provide a convenient ferry for his patrons. Ten years later such a ferry near the present Federal bridge, is referred to in the records implying that it had been in operation for a considerable period.

The winter of 1728 was a busy time in Pennycook. The cart way was further improved in anticipation of increased travel, and the fences on the intervale were rushed to completion. These fences were planned to be continuous the entire length of the village from Eleven Lots north to Horseshoe pond where a gate was hung to permit passage around the pond on the highway to Ebenezer Eastman's ferry. These fences then continued around the west side of the pond, their purpose being to protect the cultivated land from cattle and hogs apt to run wild. Quantities of logs and sawed lumber were used in this way and each settler was responsible for that part of the fence in the rear of his house lot. In spite of the faithful majority, there were a few slackers who failed to do their part and cattle strayed into the fields and destroyed a part of the precious first crop of corn. Complaint to the Committee of the General Court followed promptly, that "sundry disorderly persons (had) failed in bringing forward the settlement as was proposed."

During the winter of 1729 work was resumed upon the road which gradually replaced the rough cart way into our valley. The Proprietors voted a new "ford way over the Sow Cooke river" and a branch road from the original cart way on the Plains. This branch approached the river opposite Eleven Lots and there the first official ferry was established. Nehemiah Carlton, a Proprietor, was already at work on a ferry boat which he had been commissioned to build - a substantial one nineteen feet long and "finished fit to carry people and creatures." Another Proprietor,

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Henry Rolfe, had finished a ferry boat to cross the Suncook river and thus, with improvements on the road, the incoming settlers were assured of a fairly comfortable journey to Pennycook.

The time had arrived for the choice of a permanent minister—the climax of all preparations for the new settlement. This was the concern of the Proprietors at each of their meetings during 1729 and a committee had been carefully selected for the purpose: John Osgood, John Chandler and William Barker of Andover; John Pecker of Haverhill, Joseph Hall of Bradford and Ebenezer Eastman and Nathan Simonds already resident in Pennycook. These men were commissioned "to call and agree with some suitable person to be minister of the town of Pennycook", at a salary of one hundred pounds. At the October meeting of the Proprietors an assessment of twenty shillings per settler had been voted "toward the support of an orthodox minister \*\*\*\*\* for the current year."

The records of March 31, 1730 give first mention of the name of Rev. Timothy Walker as the candidate with whom the committee is "to treat \*\*\*\*\* in order to his settlement in the work of the ministry." The settlers already knew Mr. Walker personally according to a memorandum recently found and now filed in the Concord Room of our Public Library. This document seems to have been written by Esq. Charles Walker, a grandson of the Minister and it states that, after graduation from Harvard college in 1725, the young man spent four years teaching school in Haverhill and Andover where many of the Proprietors lived. Furthermore, "In 1729 and 1730 he spent the most of the Summer there". (i.e. in Pennycook)

Decision having been made "to call" Mr. Walker, the Proprietors appointed a committee for "speedy repairing (of) the meeting-house" and quite properly made Nathan Simonds a member thereof. From then on the settlers looked forward to the ordination of their Minister as a goal

of prime importance. There was deep respect for the clergy and it was their purpose to deal as liberally with their Minister as their uncertain finances might permit. Good judgment and caution must prevail over any natural enthusiasm, in the arrangements to be made. They could not wisely invite unnecessary liability for their own future or that of their children in this frontier town, and so they provided a modest salary for their new Minister, with assurance of an annual increase. They made a special appropriation of one hundred pounds for a suitable house to be built for him within eighteen months. Facing the possibility that this contract might be of long duration, they cautiously provided "that, if Mr. Walker, by extreme old age, <sup>shall be</sup> ~~is~~ disenabled from carrying on the whole work of the ministry, he shall abate so much of his salary as shall be rational." Since Mr. Walker was then barely twenty-five years old, such provision looked far into the future.

During that summer of 1730 while Rev. Timothy Walker was preaching in Pennycook, he undoubtedly watched the building of his own log house and likely lent a hand in its construction. The house lot set apart for the Minister long before the settlers knew his identity, was, quite properly, Lot I on Range I on the east side of the village street and at the corner of present Eastman St. The home lot was No. 51 Great Plain, a tract of nearly seven acres, and it adjoined the house lot on the east. The reserved Parsonage Lot to be used by Mr. Walker, included No. 50 on Great Plain lying next east of 51. (See Map Chapter II)

The large Walker barn built in 1834, stands on the site of the Minister's log house and at the corner of that barn there is a granite post such as was used in the old days before fences were built, to protect corner buildings from damage by ox carts. The inscription on this stone was made at the direction of Joseph B. Walker, great grandson of the Minister.

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The summer of 1730 was lively with accomplishment. The ~~three~~<sup>e</sup> year limit was nearly up and work on the cabins of the town must be pushed to completion. The certainty that the settlers and their families must soon occupy these homes, hastened further improvement on the road between Chester and Pennycook. The new "ford way" across the "Sow Cook river" was to be abandoned for a "good bridge" already under construction. The long fence in the rear of the Range I house lots was still unfinished and a fine was ordered against those delinquent in the matter. John Merrill, Proprietor, from Haverhill, was appointed first ferryman with a bonus of twenty acres of land near the site of the ferry at the South End.

Of course the new ferry boat was ready for use by the time the river ice broke up in the spring and a fine craft it must have been, since it served as standard some years later for a similar boat in a new neighboring town. The settlers of New Amesbury (Warner) "Voted to Build a Boat at Controock river as Big as Deacon merrill's fary Boat is at Concord." The ferry on the Contoocook river was at a point about a third of a mile down river from the present bridge in Contoocook village and the old road after leaving Putney hill, turned past the scene of Indian massacre and may still be recognized where it leaves the present highway from Contoocook to Penacook and descends to the river.

During this summer of 1730 a vacant lot on Range 3 was laid out for a burying ground which is maintained to this day. Within its enclosure one may become acquainted with the families of the pioneers of two centuries and more ago. The location indicates ~~indicates~~ that, even at that early day, town sentiment was in favor of a nearby site for the permanent meeting-house which must soon take the place of the crude block house. New England custom called for meeting-house and burying ground

to be adjacent: moreover the Minister's home and his parsonage lot were in the neighborhood.

The new cabins were crude in construction since they were for temporary use. Some may have been of hand-hewn plank five or six inches thick and fifteen to twenty inches in width, but the majority were probably built of rough logs like those used in the block house. The earliest cabins could have had floors of hand-hewn planks for Simond's saw mill was not in operation until the spring of 1729. Roofs were of thatch or bark and chimneys were built of field stone which was over abundant. Few, if any, of these primitive houses could have had glass for their windows.

In the Proprietors' records of 1730, a new name appears—that of Abraham Bradley. The year before, he brought his wife, Abigail Philbrick, and their brood of ten children from Haverhill to Pennycook. They lived in the house built on Lot No. 2 on the Island Range, which was the property of Proprietor John Ayer. In the summer of 1732, Bradley purchased Lot No. 1 next south and at the corner of present No. State and Penacook streets. In September he purchased the house and lot where he lived and one-half of the Proprietor's right which "s<sup>d</sup> John Ayer drewed in s<sup>d</sup> pennycook." The following year, Bradley added Lot No. 3 on Island Range to his homestead. These three house lots lay on the high ground west of Horseshoe pond and comprised four and a half acres and, in addition, he farmed half of the Ayer lot on fertile Horseshoe Island. A few years later, he bought five acres where Wood's brook empties into Horseshoe pond.

Abraham Bradley prospered, adding again and again to his holdings so that he was able to provide a farm adjacent to his own, for his son, Jonathan (b. 1717). In 1745 Jonathan sold this farm of thirty acres with the house he had built and a barn purchased from his father, to a younger brother, Samuel (b. 1721) because he, Jonathan, was marrying an Exeter girl and was to move to that town. In August of the following year the

two Bradley brothers were killed in the Indian massacre on the road to Millville but the Bradley descendents for three more generations, lived on the homestead created by Abraham Bradley and played a fine part in the making of Concord.

Abraham Bradley had little education but he possessed character and the enterprise which made him a valuable addition to the pioneer group in Pennycook. In 1730 he was a member of two local committees-one for establishing a town pound which was built on Pond Hill, and the other for repairing the road into Pennycook which included building the new bridge over Soucook river.