

## Part of a Paper Read at Advance Club by Isabel Russell

[This paper was presented in 1959 to the Advance Club of Dixfield and was reprinted as part of the town of Dixfield's 2003 bicentennial calendar. Typed as written on December 30, 2002 from a copy supplied by Dexter Stowell.]

Once upon a time this valley of our lovely river was the home of the redmen. Four hundred years ago one of the most numerous, powerful and savage tribes of Maine, the Anasagunticooks, or Androscoggins, as they were sometimes called, roamed this land. Their hunting grounds covered our entire river valley with a fort at Brunswick, a place of council at Lewiston, and on the broad intervals of Canton were encampments of the Rocameco tribe, a branch of the Anasagunticooks. There was no tribe more hostile or vindictive than the Androscoggins. Their war parties ever ready to raise the battle cry in defense of their people went far and wide. During King Phillips war, under their chief, Sagamore Tarumkin, they joined Phillips forces in Massachusetts, and after ten years of peace they again became active and made attacks on colonies, beginning to settle on the lower Androscoggin. Up to this time, owing to their secluded location, they had been less disturbed by white people than any other tribe of Maine. Finally, the Government of Boston sent an expedition against them to destroy their fort at Lewiston, then called Upper Falls, but the Government seemed content to make no further inroads and their haunts were unmolested, but they still sent our war parties. After many years of fighting this tribe became very much depleted and early in the seventeenth century the French induced many of the Androscoggins, with the remnants of other tribes, to retire to Canada. But a few of the tribe remained in this locality for many years afterwards.

At the outbreak of the Revolution about forty of them still made the shores and islands of our river their home. A century ago there must have been a few survivors, for I have heard my grandmother tell of their temporary camp in front and to the left of our house, probably made on their way to the fishing and hunting grounds farther up the river. One of her earliest recollections was of being carried in her father's arms to see the Indians, and of how frightening she was at their strange looks and ways. She also remembered of seeing their canoes on the river.

When the last Indian disappeared, or where, no man can tell. Possibly he went to his brother's in Canada. He might have joined the remnant of the Penobscots in eastern Maine or perhaps he lingered on in his old haunts till called to the happy hunting ground of the Great Spirit. Now we have only the name of the lake at Canton and the name of our beautiful river to perpetuate the memory of the once powerful tribe.

Before the arrival of the white settlers in this section there was a period during which the primeval forests were disturbed only by native beasts or by these last remaining Indian hunters, or by the advent of adventuresome white hunters or trappers.

At this time, in the town of Sutton, Mass. Lived Col. Jonathan Holman, a descendent of one of the pioneer settlers of Sutton North Parish. Col. Holman had given distinguished service in the Indian French wars. He had served long, and suffered much. He often related the story of how at one time he barely escaped starvation by holding in his mouth for nearly a week, a pork rind which he dared not swallow for fear he could not get another. He was 43 years old when the Revolutionary war broke out. He gave gallant service in this war. After the war was over, Col. Holman became interested in the purchase of public land. This section of the country was then known as part of the unappropriated public lands east of the Saco. In 1787 Col. Holman with Deacon Waters and Capt. Elliott, both of Sutton, cruised our locality. These men with 25 others succeeded in purchasing from the committee for sale of eastern land, a tract on the east side

of the Androscoggin river. A committee was chosen who laid out the township into 100 acre lots. There were 64 shares in the original township. This township was comprised of the land now known as Mexico and Dixfield. This purchase was called #1, Androscoggin purchase #1, or Holman town, until the incorporation of Dixfield in 1863. The remnant was then known as Holman town until the incorporation of Mexico 15 years later. The town line then ran back of the Trask house and the main highway over Harlow hill. Doctor Dix, one of the heavy land owners, bought the privilege of naming the town, by the promise of a library. After the incorporation of the town the settlers waited some time and receiving no library mentioned the subject to the busy doctor who was also a druggist and lived in Boston. Not long after, they received an old trunk containing about 50 second hand books. These constituted the doctor's library.

Who was the first white man to attempt to make for himself a home in this locality? We are not certain. John Stockbridge was the first to build his cabin in the town and his son erected the second frame house, but later they moved to Byron and settled Stockbridge hill. To Peter, Jonathan and Ebeneza Holman, the sons of Col. Holman of Sutton, is generally accorded the distinction of being the first permanent settlers. Peter, the young son of Jonathan was the first white child born in the township. Ebeneza Holman was the grandfather of Margaret Waite. A Mr. Foster from Augusta, in the company of one of the first land owners, visited the home of Ebeneza Holman, fell in love with Ebeneza's daughter and married her.

In the history of Sutton we read of Col. Holman making an occasional visit to his boys down in Maine. He always rode in the saddle. His rule was to ride 70 miles a day. He had a powerful high spirited horse which he called his war horse. It was never broken to harness and it could be managed by no one but himself. Years ago an old lady named Wheeler, then 100 years old told Mrs. Waite of Col. Holman calling at her home, which sat in back of the Charles Towle home. She brought a chair for the Colonel to mount, although at that time she was 75 years old, spurning the chair he vaulted into the saddle lightly as a boy.

Early records mentioned the coming of quite a colony from Sutton to settle here in 1790. Marsh, Waite, Gould, Torrey, Severy, Leland, Marble, Putnam, Elliott, Mitchell, Stockbridge, Trask, and others. Most of these settlers selected the hills and ridges in the central part of the town for their first clearings on or about (the Common). In the vicinity of East Dixfield the Severys were probably among the first to settle. One of these Severys claimed the distinction of felling the first trees on Severy Hill, 1 ½ miles from East Dixfield, the place now marked by a big boulder. The Lelands settled Science hill. Solomon Leland was sent as a delegate to Portland in 1819 to help form a constitution for the new state of Maine.

On the opposite side of the road from the Reed house (Effie Cameron's) and a bit farther down under a steep hill was built the first frame house in the town of Dixfield by General John Holland, the great, great grandfather of Ella Russell and the great great, great grandfather of Tom, Dana, and Herschel Holt. Mother Russell tells of how at one time the women of that neighborhood were having a social evening at this home and of how the men having not been invited procured a porcupine, went to the top of the hill, and threw the animal down the chimney, thereby producing great consternation. The women were panic-stricken and some thought that the devil had claimed them for his own.

Farther up the river lived the Marbles, Norcrosses and pious Wheelers. The Marshes settled on the road that passes the Gates house. They were of old and honorable stock. The first preacher of Sutton was a Marsh, and to his wife Abigail, was born the first white child in Sutton.

Dixfield village was the last part of the town to be settled. Doctor Dix is said to have erected the first frame house which is now standing and houses our library.

Major Amos Trask, son of Samuel Trask, one of the first settlers of Sutton, came with the first settlers. He was engaged to marry Lucy Parks of Sutton. After he had been there a short time she joined him, making the journey alone over spotted trails. They married and lived in a house near the Common. In 1820 Amos Trask bought the Doctor Dix house, which at that time was unfinished, and moved into this part of the town. Major Trask had had two shares in the original township. Later, he bought two more. He lived only a few years after moving here. He was a self made man, industrious, frugal, a generous neighbor and a faithful friend. During the year that there was no summer he had a large stock of corn which would have commanded a good price. He would not sell, but supplied poor people who had none. When he died he was a rich man for those times, have estate worth \$10,000.

His children were among the first settlers of this village. Peter, the only son, was the father of John, Oscar, and Louisa Trask. Lucina, the oldest daughter was Lelia Foster's great grandmother. Lucy, the second daughter, was a true pioneer mother, going far and near in cases of sickness and trouble. She was the mother of Delphine Root and Emily Knight. Louisa, the third daughter, was Walter Chase's grandmother. Her husband kept a store. Liquor was then sold as freely as molasses. When Mr. Chase sold liquor to men with poor families, Aunt Cina, as she was called, stopped them on their way home and gave them supplies from her own store. When Mr. Chase remonstrated, she said, "Mr. Chase, just as long as you dispense liquor to these men, just so long shall I dispense provisions."

The fourth daughter of Major Trask was Ann, the mother of William Eustis and Mary Greenleaf – Mason, Wallace, Albert, Humphrey Eustis and Sarah Mitchell.

Susan was the youngest daughter, and my great grandmother. Susan was quite a handful in her youthful days. I have heard them tell of the time that her sisters and their beaux went for a horseback ride on the Mexico road, leaving Susan at home. Two young for a swain and with no mount except an old work horse, which after their departure she mounted bare back, urged to it's utmost speed and overtook them. Needless to say that she somewhat marred the pleasure of their ride, as passing them ever and anon riding back she reminded each one of instances of their past, better left unmentioned.

Susan was 15 years old when her father died. She went to a private school, met [Isaac] Newton Stanley and became engaged to him. Susan was named for her aunt, the second wife of Col. Holman. She went to Sutton to visit this aunt to buy her trousseau, one of the articles of which was a leghorn flat with a crown 9" high worn with a clouded blue pelisse.

The Stockbridges have already been mentioned as early settlers. Joseph Edmond's mother was the daughter of that name. She married an Edmond who came to this town as a blacksmith, no mean calling in those days. Other Edmonds settled in Mexico. A story is told of two of these Edmonds, one a very small man. They journeyed into this country thru New Hampshire on foot, with all their earthly possessions tied in bundles and strung on sticks, carried over their shoulders. They had but 2¢ in money between them. On the way they came to a toll bridge. Two cents was charged per person for crossing. What should they do? After a few minutes conference they approached the toll taker and inquired if the price was the same for light and heavy packs. On being assured that it was, the smaller paid 2¢ and mounted his brother's shoulders, and the crossing was made. So might I go on for hours telling of the different families and incidents of these early settlers; of Cox who drove the stage to Augusta in later years; of Eustis who having sold the township for \$10,000, came here and built a home and mill; of Mitchells, Baxters, Brocks, and many more, but time forbids further mention of these individual families.

The first homes which the early settlers built were small and crude log cabins. A few years sufficed for the clearing away of a large portion of forests and fencing of fields for cultivation. Orchards were planted.

Soon nearly everything was produced at home that was needed for convenience and rough comfort. Every farmer kept a few sheep for wool and raised flax to make clothing for summer wear. Not a small part of the house industry was the spinning of the wool which had been carded into rolls by hand. The weaving was all done at home on hand looms. From 3 to 5 yards was all that could be woven in a day. A shoe maker came to the home once a year and made shoes for the family for winter. They went barefoot during the summer.

Huge fireplaces supplied heat for warmth and contained cranes for cooking. Brick ovens were heated once a month when they baked pies, beans, indian puddings, pound, fruit, and seed cakes. I have heard my grandmother tell of how her mother stored her pies well covered on the spare chamber floor and how at one time being sent on an errand there in the evening she forgot the pies and stepped in every one. They made their own soap from scraps of fat. Tallow candles served for illumination.

In the earliest days of the settlers they made a trip to Augusta in ox teams once a year, preferably in winter, for supplies which consisted for the most part of a hogs head of molasses and barrel of codfish. There was little money used in those days. Of \$75.00 worth of trade only \$3.00 to \$5.00 was given in exchange, the rest barter. Mrs. William Waite's father owned Siberia and made shingles, and took them to Augusta once a year for barter.

In cases of sickness there was no doctor. The experienced mothers of the communities served as nurses and dispensed simple remedies. Mrs. Waite tells of one midwife who attended over 300 cases of child birth, traveling on horse back with saddle backs, or ox teams during the deep snow of the winter.

Neighborhood visitations served to supply amusements. There were also barn raisings, husking bees, quiltings, and occasional dances in the homes when the guests went in the afternoon, and danced till sunrise the following day. A fiddler furnished the music and the host served supper, a midnight meal, and breakfast of generous fare.

The daughters of that day were trained in the way they should go. They were taught to cook, spin, knit, weave and sew, to speak in low tones and to walk demurely. I have heard my grandmother tell of being called back many a time to walk again across the floor.

The sons were sent to school when they could be spared, usually a few weeks in the winter. The young married early in those days, but youthful cares, hard labor, homely fare and outdoor life seemed conducive to physical, mental and spiritual growth. Though they could not be called educated, they had good common sense, sound judgment, and strong purpose. They have handed down to us a legacy that no money could buy. A legacy of noble achievement through trial, hardship and sacrifice. To them we owe many of the privileges and many of the blessings we enjoy. It would be hard to select the most worthy of these earliest settlers of ours. Each family had distinctive merit. Some of them can be barely mentioned for there was not time nor means to secure information, but the records of most would be well worth our consideration I am sure.

It has been such a pleasant task, this journey back over the years, to vision the first dwellers in this locality where many of us have lived for so long, and it is a privilege to pass on to you this bit of lore of these bygone days.