

The Narragansett Sun.

HISTORY OF WESTBROOK

THURSDAY, MAY 30, 1895

CHAPTER III.

The Beginning of the Lumber Industry
at Saccarappa.

JOSEPH CONANT THE SQUATTER.

The annals are silent as to the precise time when any of the former settlers or their descendants ventured back to their old homes in Falmouth after the final dispersion in 1703. The following from the "Book of Church Records" of the old First Parish, in the handwriting of the Rev. Thomas Smith, has been most opportunely preserved, and will always be read with added interest as the years go by:

" Anno 1716, one Ingersoll built an hut on Falmouth Neck, where he lived alone sometime, and was thence called Governor Ingersoll. He was afterwards drowned at Presumpscot with one Millet by the damming of the ice, raising an head of water in the night while they were asleep. New Casco fort being demolished by order of government a few months after this, viz.: 1717, Major Moody who had been the commanding officer, with Captain Larrabee who had been a sargeant, moved their families down to the Neck and built them houses. About, this time, 1715, Mr. Skillin and Brackett settled on their fathers' old farms at Back Cove (near the present Oakdale in Deering.) Now came also Captain Coller and built a house, as did one Proctor, Doughty, Rounds, Mills, Hall, two Scales (brothers), father Thomes, Wass, (twelve in all) and John Barber and father Gustian (who died in 1718.)"

I have quoted at considerable length, for most of these names are borne by persons living in our own city at the present day, descendants generally of those mentioned in this ancient record. It was now determined to petition the General Court of Massachusetts for reincorporation

of the old town, and the prayer of the petitioners was readily granted; after which the town entered upon an era of prosperity and growth, that has always continued, although not always with the accelerated speed that many have wished. But difficulties arose within the first decade that are fully detailed in the History of Portland by the late Wm Willis, and need, therefore, only a passing reference in these chapters. I refer to the controversy between the old and new proprietors, or owners, of the common lands, which was happily adjusted by a union of the two parties in 1732, and the formation of a proprietary that continued an active existence until about 1826, and has never, as yet, it is believed, been formally dissolved. Its last clerk was Nathan Winslow of Westbrook, who died in the year last named. After the union, the work of parceling out the lands to the inhabitants who had complied with the requisite conditions, went on with great rapidity, especially in the year 1732. Most of the titles to real estate in this city have their beginning in the aforesaid grants which are to be found recorded in the Falmouth Proprietors' Records, now kept in the Cumberland Registry of Deeds, in the city of Portland.

Some of the grants, however, are to be found in the town clerk's records of the ancient town. One of these, which should be of especial interest to our citizens, is the following:

" According to ye vote of ye town, wee ye subscribers do choose ye Falls ye third falls in persumscot River and known by ye Name of Sacerape so called by ye Indians.

This Report to ye Select Men of Falmouth as witness our hands this 12th day of July, 1728.

ENJ. INGERSELL
ROBERT PEARCE
BENJ. LARRABY JR.
JOHN BAYLEY."

This was in accordance with a vote of the town at the previous annual meeting, giving to these men their choice of certain of the great water powers. There is a prevailing impression based, upon, I know not how strong, traditional authority that the first sawmills were soon after erected upon the northerly shore of the "Island," where Dana's mill now stands, and as soon as possible put in operation. An industry of so much importance, in the midst of a virgin forest, could not fail to call in a considerable number of workmen who would naturally bring along their families and erect themselves dwellings in the immediate vicinity.

But to Joseph Conant, born in Beverly on the 9th day of November, 1701, tradition ascribes the honor of having made the first permanent settlement in Saccarappa, and probably the first within our present corporate limits. Too often traditions are entirely baseless and misleading, and should, therefore, always be received with great caution. But this one I am disposed to credit as an historic verity; for it has always been accepted in the old families of the village and repeated, each time that I have heard it during a residence here of more than thirty years, with little or no variation.

Conant was the great grandson of Roger Conant, the first settler and governor of Naumkeag, now Salem. He married in Roxford, on the 9th day of December, 1725, Sarah, daughter of Thomas and Hannah Jewett. Their first child, Hannah, was born in Ipswich on the 27th day of December, 1726. On the 7th of November, 1728, a son, Lot was born in Falmouth. The year of Conant's coming to Saccarappa, tradition does not state, being content with the simple assertion that he was the pioneer settler, and brought his family and worldly wealth up the river in a canoe. In 1728 two lots of land were assigned to him, which he appears to have been obliged to give up, probably because they were claimed by old proprietors. In 1780 he was granted a ten acre lot at the head of Fore river. This, too, seems to have

been upon a former grant, for in 1734 there was laid out to him a tract of forty-three acres on the northerly side of the Presumpscot river, in lieu of his thirty, ten and three acre grants, which he had reconveyed to the Proprietors. At the same time he was also granted sixty acres on the southerly side of the Presumpscot, which I am unable to locate but I think the tract of forty-three acre is included in the William Walker farm near Pride's bridge, and was the same which Conant sold in 1761 to John Webb. At the time of the last named grants, viz.,: 1784, he was most likely living in Saccarappa, where he had already been resident for several years.

R.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HISTORY OF WESTBROOK

THURSDAY, JUNE 6, 1895

CHAPTER III – CONTINUED.

Joseph Conant and His Descendants

It would be a pleasant task to record which one, if either, of Joseph Conant's children enjoyed the distinction of being the first person of European descent born in Westbrook. A son Thomas was born in Falmouth the second day of December, 1731, and died young; but whether Conant had already made his memorable voyage up the river at this time we are not informed. With more safety, however, can we assume that he had come hither, and was well housed under his squatter roof, on the third of October, 1733, the date of the birth of his twin daughters, Elizabeth and Sarah. Respecting the subsequent career of Sarah we have no information; but Elizabeth, before the month of July, 1759, had become the wife of Ezekiel Jones, who appears subsequently to have emigrated to Royallsborough, now Durham, where both he and his wife were living in 1800.

Of Conant's son Lot, born, as we have stated, in 1728, we have no further account; but two younger sons, Bartholomew and Joseph, left a numerous posterity, although none of those bearing the family name are now left in Westbrook.

Bartholomew Conant lived near the Duck Pond. He married Anna Frink, of an old Westbrook family, and had five children, one of whom, Eunice, was the second wife of Captain Daniel Lunt, a prominent and active man in the affairs of the town in the latter part of the last century, of whom we shall speak more at length in a future chapter.

Joseph Conant, Jr., had sons Bartholomew and Thomas, and a daughter Anna, who married Nathan Partridge. He married Hannah Shackford the tenth day of June, 1762, and died in Portland the 27th of June, 1816, while attending court as a witness.

On the tenth of June, 1740, Joseph Conant, "husbandman," sells to Thomas Haskell "my dwelling house that stands on the north easterly side of Presumpscot river, near Saccarappa Falls in Falmouth." I have been informed on what I have reason to regard as reliable authority that this conveyance had something to do with the compromise of a law suit. In the deed which was not acknowledged until the 13th of May 1762, no mention is made of the land on which the house stood, which was probably a part of the old Cooper or Munjoy claim. From recitals in a deed from Haskell to one of his sons made in 1764, it would seem that he had previously received from the proprietors a grant of one hundred and three acres on the northerly side of the river at Saccarappa, which had been recovered against him in a suit by one Mary Waters of Sturbridge, Mass., widow, and which he had subsequently purchased from her.

It would seem that Conant still continued to reside at Saccarappa after selling his house to Haskell, and to diversify his farming pursuits with the management of

saw and grain mills, for in 1755 he sells one-eighth of a sawmill at Saccarappa to Enoch Freeman. The recitals in a deed from Conant to Francis Peabody of Middleton, under date twenty-fifth March, 1758, are of interest, as showing the manner in which mills and water powers were deeded in those days. The interest conveyed by this deed is one-half of one-thirtieth of the mill privilege at Saccarappa Falls with the privilege of setting mills on both sides of the river, which was granted to Benjamin Larraby and others, together with half the dwelling house and half the grist mill thereon standing, "being part of the privilege I purchased of Thomas Smith." The other half of the thirtieth part was owned, at this time, by his brother Samuel Conant, whose wife was a sister of the grantee, Peabody.

On the twenty-seventh of November, 1764, Conant conveyed lands near the Duck Pond to his sons, Joseph, Jr., and Bartholomew. This conveyance was probably made in anticipation of a surgical operation, from which he did not recover, as will appear from the following extract from the Journal of the Rev. Thomas Smith:

" 27 (November 1764,) I rode with Mr. Deane to Conant's and Proctor's; I prayed with the former, who had his leg amputated by Nathaniel Coffin, and Mr. Deane with the latter who had his arm broken in two places."

At a time when the only known anaesthetics were spirituous liquors, it is not strange, that a man of Mr. Conant's years should not withstand the shock attending so severe an operation, as the removal of a leg. From the Journal of Dr. Deane we make the following extract which concludes the life drama of this enterprising pioneer. "2 (January 1755) Attended the funeral of Mr. Conant."

Mr. Conant seems to have yielded up his life under the best surgical skill to be obtained nearer than Boston. Dr. Nathaniel Coffin, who performed the operation was no doubt, the younger or

the name then living at Falmouth Neck, where he was long an eminent and trusted practitioner. Under date of 23 August 1764, about three months prior to the operation upon Mr. Conant, Parson Smith makes the following entry in his now invaluable Journal: "Capt. Haggett in a mast ship arrived with young Dr. Coffin."

In a marginal note we are informed that he had been abroad to complete his medical education, and had pursued his studies in London, in Thomas' and Guy's Hospitals. Such advantages were then unusual with the young physician in

America, where, so far as I am able to ascertain, there were no medical colleges whatsoever, the usual method of pursuing medical study being as an articulated apprentice to an older practitioner, who at the completion of the term, gave a written certificate, *as a* sufficient diploma. Many of the pastors of the Congregational body also practiced physic; and many laymen pursued blood-letting and tooth-pulling as subsidiary vocations thereby acquiring the popular title of "doctor," which, contrary to English usage and etiquette, is now applied to members of the profession generally in this country.

R.

TO BE CONTINUED.