

The Narragansett Sun.

HISTORY OF WESTBROOK

THURSDAY, MAY 2, 1895

CHAPTER I

Previous to 1657

That enterprising annalist, the late Diedrich Knickerbocker, taking time by the scalp-lock, gives the reader to understand in the title-page to his celebrated History of New York, that his work is to begin as all exhaustive history should, with the beginning of the world. With good reason, perhaps, a similar resolution might be adopted in the present instance; for to write in a manner be-fitting the work, the initial chapter of the history of Westbrook one should possess a more or less intimate knowledge of the changes which have taken place upon the surface of the earth since the first division thereof into land and water. It has been often maintained, and no doubt many observing persons still believe, that the earliest foundations of the village of Saccarappa were laid in the bed of an extinct lake. But later investigations have rendered it tolerably certain that the first thoroughfare along which the original settlers of the village erected their habitations, was over the outlet of one of those disturbances of the earth's surface, partly eruption and partly subsidence, still known in the valley of the Presumpscot as "land slides." The "slide" in question occurred in prehistoric times, and involved an unusually wide extent of territory; but so many similar phenomena, although less in extent, have occurred within the century about to close, and have been so carefully studied and

observed at the time, that the cause, no less than the manner of their taking place, is now quite well understood.

The last slide (for the familiar name although misleading, will continue to be used both for convenience and brevity,) occurred in the autumn of 1868, and is still referred to as the Cumberland Mills or Boody slide, and doubtless began in the bottom of the Presumpscot river, about three-fourths of a mile below the dam at Cumberland Mills. At this point there had been from the earliest historic times a somewhat sharp curve in the stream towards the northerly shore, at the foot of a shelving and very steep embankment of earth. The ascent from the river bed was some thirty feet or more, and above was a large tract of level or plains land covered for the most part with a forest of pines and firs, with an intermixture of hardwood growth. The season had been unusually rainy, in consequence of which the water in the river had been greatly increased both in volume and velocity. The upland being greatly overcharged with water had become heavy far beyond its normal weight while the soil in the river valley, from being constantly flooded had become softened to an unusual degree, so that, as was readily apparent for several weeks after the slide had occurred, this great body of upland, many acres in extent, rested upon no better foundation than a semi-liquid mass of earth, largely clay and quicksand. This liquid earth from some cause or other, finding vent upwards through the bed of the river,

one morning after a renewal of the heavy rains of the season, soon filled the curve where it occurred in both directions; and as the soft material was forced upward there was a corresponding subsidence of the upland so that in the course of a few hours about thirty acres of plains land, previously described, had settled down into a rough and broken area of sandy loam from the surface, and clay that had been trapped upward through innumerable fissures, nearly on a level with the waters of the river that now sought a new or more direct channel to the bed of the stream below.

Now to return to the great prehistoric slide at Saccarappa. That this slide took place prior to the date above given (1657) is quite certain from the fact that that year the attention of English settlers was turned in this direction, and lands extending from the Capisic river to the present Cumberland Mills were acquired by purchase from an Indian sagamore. But there is good reason for believing that its occurrence was long after the floating iceberg had ceased to leave its creases upon the rocks and, the face of the land had settled down to its present conformation of plain and hill, and valley, lake and river. And it was probably, too, years and years, after the Presumpscot had begun its march from the lake to the ocean by substantially the same course that it pursues today, and the Stroudwater had begun its meanderings through the virgin forest in the direction of the estuary or arm of the sea that was afterward to play such an important part in the commerce of the colonies as a safe harbor for the mast-snows of Westbrook and Waldo.

At a point in the earth's surface, perhaps not then named, but afterwards called in the dialect of the

Abnakis, Sacaribeag, the Presumpscot made a sharp deflection "toward the rising sun" and flowed onward toward the rocky rapids near the Indian planting ground at old Ammoncongan and thence into the dark and swampy tangle of trees and shrubs to the eastward, through which by circuitous windings, it found its way to the briny deep. Reasoning from what we know of the original condition and appearance of the country about the Boody slide, we may safely conclude that the southerly shore of our river before this great slide was near where the present station of the Portland & Rochester railway at Saccarappa is now situated. Southerly and westerly from this point was a vast tract of nearly level or gently undulating forest upland, over which the wild deer bounded at will; and where the lynx and the bear, the wolf and the panther, divided the spoils of the chase with the red man. But there came a day, or a night, no doubt in a season when Jupiter Pluvius was in charge of an unorganized bureau of the weather, when, out of this vast tract, two hundred or more acres of ground, suddenly and without warning, subsided, carrying with it all that grew or roamed thereof, damming the swollen waters of the river and changing the face of the subsiding ground from upland to meadow. The contour of this subsidence, marked until recent years by precipitous tanks, is still easily traced and the place where it sank to the greatest depth is still known locally, as the "old cellar."

R.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HISTORY OF WESTBROOK

THURSDAY, MAY 9, 1895

CHAPTER I

Previous to 1657

It should be stated that all happenings that pertained to the territory, that now comprises the city of Westbrook at the time of which we are writing, pertained also to the territory of larger extent, which subsequently received incorporation under the name of Falmouth. That ancient township included, besides numerous islands in Casco Bay, the present cities of Portland, Deering and Westbrook, and the towns of South Portland, Cape Elizabeth and Falmouth. The first settlements within the limits of Falmouth of which any recorded *data*, have come down to us, were made upon Richmond's Island, which may still be seen off the Cape Elizabeth shore, near the mouth of Spurwink river. Here, as early as 1628, dwelt one Walter Bagnal, otherwise called "Great Wat," who was engaged in receiving furs from the Indians in exchange for English merchandise and other commodities. He is said to have incurred the hatred of the red men, in consequence of which he was killed by them in 1631. A companion of Bagnal was also slain and their house plundered and burnt. The crimes were supposed to have been perpetrated by a chieftain named Squitterrygusset, and his men; but it was not until the following year that the blood of Bagnal and his companion, as it cried from the sod of Richmond's Island, penetrated the dull ears of the English; then, however, in January, 1683, the crew from a vessel which was cruising along the eastern shore in pursuit of pirates, put in at Richmond's Island, where they found a sachem from

Massachusetts known as "Black-William of Nahant," whom they proceeded to hang to the nearest tree, notwithstanding he protested his innocence and was known to be a friend of the whites.

Meanwhile Squitterrygusset, for whose act Black William was thus made to suffer vicariously, was spared to give to the white land speculator the first deed of lands within our city. This sachem with the long name is supposed by the late Hon. William Willis, to have ruled over a tribe or clan of Abnakis, known as the Aucociscos, from which is abbreviated our familiar name of Casco. This is thought to have been the same tribe which fished and hunted along the Presumpscot river, and whose squaws, in springtime, at old Ammoncongan, and over which, in subsequent years, resigned the half-breed, Polin, who was shot at Manchester at New Marblehead, now Windham, in 1756.

As localities in and about Saccarappa still preserve, in their local nomenclature, the traditions of the beaver, and as this animal furnished the most valuable peltry which the white trader acquired by barter from the Indian, it is probable that during the three years that Walter Bagnal pursued his calling on Richmond's Island, the Indian trapper and hunter was engaged in the extermination of this most interesting animal within our present city limits. I have often inquired, but with no satisfactory results, how and why the well-known Beaver Pond in Saccarappa was given its name. I assume, however, as perfectly reasonable, that some time in the past the beaver built his dam upon the little rill that emptied into the pond near the

present dwelling house of Mr. William C. Phinney; and that the "Beaver-Dam brook" so called, on Longfellow Street, within the limits of Gorham, was in the possession, when the white settlers came, of the animals whose presence and peculiar industry suggested its name.

Other fur bearing animals, too, had their habitat within our present corporate limits, in those early times. In fact I have heard from the lips of a gentleman who has passed away within the last few years, that up to the beginning of the present century the bears were so numerous in the vicinity of Saccarappa that they made great havoc in the farmers' cornfields; and that a familiar mode of destroying them was by the use of a rude log trap, known as a "figure four." I remember particularly of being told that this method of capturing bruin was exercised by the Johnson brothers, whose farm was where the late Rufus Johnson lived and died, on Saco Street.

Besides the red deer, the moose and caribou, (which latter is said to be a first cousin of the rein deer), roamed through the virgin forests which were found by our ancestors, or grazed upon the open plains where the great fires had destroyed the trees and underbrush. All these animals were useful to the Indian; their flesh as an article of food and their hides for clothing, for strings for his bow, for thongs for his snow shoes in winter, and for covering for his canoes at all seasons.

But now the white man comes upon the scene, and this paradise of the Indian, which he had never appreciated as such until it was too late,— but with what keen appreciation would it have been hailed in its primeval state by the modern sportsman who puts in his summer vacations at Moosehead or

the Rangeleys!—must give way before his devastating hand. Lands and the stately forest trees, that count so little in the economy of savage life, what visions of wealth and self-aggrandizement did they raise to the imagination of the European adventurer! For a mere trifle, a few beads of glass, perhaps, the Indian gave up his heritage, and the pale-faced stranger felled the forest trees and set about making for himself a permanent abode in the Sagamore's ancient hunting grounds.

NOTE.—Soon after the occurrence of the "Boody slide" in 1868, a paper upon that, and other similar occurrences in the vicinity, was prepared and read by an eminent scientist before the Boston Natural History Society, in which it was maintained that previous to the prehistoric slide at Saccarappa, the waters of the Presumpscot had flowed into the head of the estuary known as the Fore river at Stroudwater; and this, like most radical theories, found ready support at the time.

Had arguments, involving a knowledge of the mysteries of geology as a science been adduced in favor of his position by the gentleman referred to, I should not then, nor at the present, time, have ventured to utter my dissent. It was thought, however, and by not a few boldly stated, that the bed of the ancient river could be traced over a part, if not all, of the distance between Saccarappa and Stroudwater. From careful personal observation I am able to state that such is not the fact; and had the gentleman who advanced the theory been at the pains to go over the ground himself before preparing his paper, nothing more would ever have been heard of it. From Deer Hill, on the present easterly bounding of Westbrook, to the shores of the Stroudwater is a tract of land much higher than the shores of the Presumpscot at Saccarappa, which the extinct river bed should in theory, but does not in fact, traverse; and in view of this fact I need only appeal to the unscientific but nevertheless reliable experience of mankind, that unless an exception is to be found in the case of the Mississippi, water was never known to run up hill between the shores of an open stream.

R.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)