



Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts, Vol. 2 (Classic Reprint)

Benjamin F. Arrington

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Excerpt from Municipal History of Essex County in Massachusetts, Vol. 2

The story of an old New England town like Haverhill, rich in traditions, events, history and active participation in great historical movements, can be told within the limits of this article only by selection from its records, and not in full detail. It was the sixth Essex plantation to be established, Salem (1626), Lynn (1629), Ipswich (1633), Newbury (1635), and Rowley (1639) being settled earlier. The exact list of the first settlers and the exact date of its settlement, whether 1640 or 1641, are unknown, since records of the very earliest years either were not kept or were lost. We know, however, that in response to the request of the Rev. Nathaniel Ward and his son-in-law, Giles Firman, both of Ipswich, the General Court on May 13, 1640, made grant to "Mr. Ward and Newberry men" of a new plantation on the Merrimack, giving them choice of location at Pentucket (later Haverhill) or Cochichewick (later Andover), "provided they return answer within three weeks from the 21st present, & that they build there before the next Courte." Evidently they returned answer, selecting Pentucket, and made a beginning of building in the summer of 1640; for at the next General Court, meeting October 7, 1640, commissioners were appointed to view the bounds between "Mr. Ward's plantation" and Colchester (later Salisbury). A similar order by the General Court, June 2, 1641, appointed a committee "to set out the bounds between Salisbury & Pantucket, ali: Haverhill. They are to determine the bounds which Mr. Ward & his company are to enjoy as a town or village if they have 6 houses up by the next General Court in the 8th m. (October)." This order contains the first mention of the name chosen for the new settlement, Haverhill, and marks the desire of the Rev. Mr. Ward to perpetuate in the New World the name of the old town in England whence he came and where generations of his family had lived. It is probable that the number of settlers in the new plantation was very small and the houses very few in the summer of 1641, for the order contains the condition "if they have 6 houses up by the next General Court." Nathaniel Ward had sought the establishment of this settlement, not for himself, but in the interests of his son-in-law, Giles Firman, a physician, and of his son, John Ward, a clergyman. Firman did not remove to Haverhill, but the Rev. John Ward, accompanied by John Fawn and Hugh Sherratt, went from Ipswich to Haverhill in 1641. Of the early settlers it is possible that James Davis, John Robinson, Abraham Tyler and Joseph Merrie settled in Haverhill in 1640; it is probable that in addition to John Ward, John Fawn and Hugh Sherratt, Job Clements, William White, Samuel Guile and Richard Littlehale became settlers in 1641; and it is certain that in addition to these, Robert Clements, Tristram Coffyn and Thomas Davis were dwellers here in 1642.

When the first settlers came from Newbury and Ipswich up the Merrimack river to the site of the Indian village of Pentucket, no red man dwelt there and no wigwam stood there. Doubtless the place had been desolated by that fatal epidemic of 1616-17, under which whole Indian villages wasted away and the New England tribes were reduced to feeble remnants of their former strength.

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