

THE EARLIEST BEGINNINGS

Grantham's history of settlement was determined by her geography which, in turn, had been determined by her geology millions of years before. The charters of 1761 and 1767 only specified a six-mile square area to be settled. The natural features in that 36 square miles were of no concern to the proprietors who only sought a return on the money that they had invested. The presence of Grantham Mountain, rising to 2661 feet at its highest point, would be a deterrent to the earliest arrivals who sought farm land. Hewing fields and pastures out of granite and tree-covered terrain must have been dispiriting to those looking to start a new life.

The ancient White and Green Mountains, the Adirondacks, and the Taconics were all formed by early continents as they collided, pushing masses of sediments and softer rocks upward, forming peaks like those now seen in the Alps, Himalayas and Rocky Mountains. Unlike these geologically younger peaks which remain today, the mountains of New England and the eastern United States have been worn down by millions of years of erosion to form the relatively low, rounded profile seen today. Unique to the Grantham area are granite domes which were formed from molten magma deep beneath the original mountains. Grantham Mountain is what remains of one of these plutons.

The most notable hills in Grantham are Sargent's Hill (1400 feet), Dunbar Hill (1300 feet) and Howe Hill (1100 feet). Other natural phenomena include Kimball Ledges, Lovers' Leap and Hedgehog Hole. The first settlement in Grantham on the Mountain at Four Corners was at 1700 feet elevation.

A quartz vein and associated minerals crosses the town. A 19th century New Hampshire Gazetteer reported that "in the northwest corner of the town is found in large quantities a substance which, being clarified, produces a paint similar to spruce yellow, or, being burned, to Spanish brown." A spring of supposedly medicinal waters was recorded in the 19th century, located somewhere near the current main entrance to Eastman.

INDIANS

There is no documentary evidence that Indians ever roamed the woods of Grantham according to the New Hampshire Archeological Society. However, the proximity of trails, campsites and navigable waters nearby would suggest that they might have passed through the area, long before Grantham became a town.

The numbers of Indians in New England prior to the devastating epidemics that reduced their numbers by as much as 90% between 1616 and 1620 and in the 1630s have been estimated at between 24,000 and 28,000. In New Hampshire, there may have been 6000 to 8000 Indians, all of whom belonged to the Western Abnakis. In addition to infectious illnesses, wars also decimated the Indian population. These included the Pequot Wars, King Phillip's War, King William's War, Queen Ann's War, King George's War and the

French and Indian Wars. The last Indian attack in the Upper Connecticut Valley occurred in 1740 in Royalton, Vermont, only 25 years before the arrival of Grantham settlers.

Indians also became slaves for white men although this practice was discouraged by taxation on slaves in New Hampshire, a law passed in 1728. Census records indicate that in the state there were 657 slaves reported in 1775 and only 8 by 1800. The first census in which Grantham participated, in 1773, reported one male slave in town in a population of 60 souls. One slave was again recorded in 1790.

Early settlers often used Indian trails to move from place to place; the trails sometimes were turned into primitive roads as towns became established. Locations of trails, villages and camping grounds were published by Chester Price in the New Hampshire Archeologist in 1967. Camping grounds in our area were found in Springfield on Lake Kolelemook and on Lake Mascoma in Enfield. Artifacts from an Indian village in Lyme have been found. A village of Pennacook Indians was sited near Newbury, New Hampshire with camping locations around Lake Sunapee.

Waterways were major transportation routes. The Connecticut River served this purpose from the Connecticut Lakes in northern New Hampshire to Long Island Sound and was called the Connecticut Trail. It is likely that Indian villages grew up in the floodplain where staples of the Indian diet and tobacco were grown. Other trails in our area include the Mascoma-Aquadoctan trail and the Sunapee trail. The former began in what is now West Lebanon, at the intersection of the Connecticut River and the Mascoma River, tracked along the Mascoma River to Lake Mascoma and headed east towards Bristol.

The Sunapee trail began at the mouth of the Sugar River on the Connecticut Trail and followed the course of the Sugar River to Lake Sunapee. Another trail from the western shore of Lake Sunapee went to Lake Kolelemook in Springfield and from there to Lake Mascoma.

Although Grantham was not “on the way” to anywhere in pre-colonial times, it is possible that the ponds, streams and woods attracted Indians in search of food for their families.