


# SKETCH OF WEYMOUTH.



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## CHAPTER I.

Geography — Geology — General History — Weston's Colony — Gorges's Settlement — Hull's Company — Ecclesiastical Troubles — Pequod War — Emigration — Town Government.

**GEOGRAPHY.**— Weymouth is the most ancient town in Norfolk County, and, next to Plymouth, in the Commonwealth, and its original boundaries have been preserved without material change until the present time; therefore its lines are the same for any date in its history of two hundred and sixty years. The town borders upon the shore of Boston Harbor, with its centre about thirteen miles southeasterly from Boston, and about double that distance northwesterly from Plymouth.

It is above nine miles in extreme length from the Abington line on the south, to the shore of the bay on the north, with an average of about seven miles. It lies between Braintree and Holbrook on the west, and Hingham on the east, with a width, nearly uniform, of about two and a half miles. It has a water front on Fore and Back Rivers of eight or nine miles, and its whole area contains between sixteen and seventeen square miles. Of this area a considerable portion is covered by ponds. Great Pond, in the southerly part, is about a mile and one third in length, and one third of a mile in width, with a surface of about two hundred and fifty acres. Whitman's Pond, centrally located, is about one third less in extent than Great Pond, being



nearly as long, but of very irregular form. Whortleberry Pond, a little south of Whitman's, is small, nearly circular, and about forty rods in diameter. There are but two streams of any importance, — "Mill River," the outlet to Great Pond, running into Back River, a distance by its course, in which it passes through Whitman's Pond, of five or six miles, and "Old Swamp River," rising in Hingham and flowing into Whitman's Pond, about two and one half or three miles in length. These rivers have several very fine water privileges, one of which, that of the East Weymouth Iron Company, has been thought one of the best in the State. There are but two hills of noticeable prominence in the town, — Great Hill, on the shore of the bay, and King Oak Hill, about two miles farther south.<sup>1</sup> From the summits of both are to be seen some of the finest views in the State. There are two inlets making in from the bay, navigable for vessels of considerable size, — Fore River on the north and west, four or five miles in length, and Back River on the northeast, three or four miles long. The extreme northeasterly portion of the town is a long and narrow neck of land extending into the bay for a mile and a half or more, while beyond this, to the north, about eighty rods away, lies Grape Island, separated only by the narrow mouth of Back River, and is of an oblong shape, about half a mile in length and sixty rods in width, while about two hundred rods far-

<sup>1</sup> These two hills are regularly formed mounds, easily ascended, and have been from the beginning of English occupation, favorite locations, and have been under cultivation to their summits during the whole period since that time. Great Hill, early known as Smith's Hill, situated on the verge of the bay in the extreme north, was a landmark to the early voyagers about Massachusetts Bay, and has since served the same useful purpose to their successors. There was formerly a road leading to its summit. King Oak Hill has not so sharp an elevation, is situated farther inland, and was evidently used by the emigrants as garden spots, as it was divided into small lots. It overlooks the country for a long distance inland, while on the east the view is bounded only by the ocean.



ther to the north, in the bay, lies another small island, called Sheep Island.<sup>1</sup> Both of these belong to Weymouth, are wholly destitute of trees, and used only for pasturage.

Almost the whole of the south part of the town is an elevated plateau, with a light sandy or gravelly soil, capable, with good tillage, of producing fair crops. The surface from this plain commences to fall away with gentle undulations until it reaches the sea. The northern portion has always enjoyed the reputation of containing the best land for cultivation, while only a comparatively small portion of the whole area is unfit for agricultural purposes in consequence of swamp, ledge, or barrenness. Formerly farming was the principal industry, and the larger portion of the population gained their livelihood from the produce of the soil; but during the present century manufactures have increased to such an extent as almost to exterminate the former. On Fore and Back Rivers a large amount of business is done in lumber and coal, while the Old Colony and South Shore Railroads bring in great quantities of grain, flour, and other necessaries.

For the first hundred years the town constituted one precinct, but in 1723 it was divided into two, the south being somewhat the larger. Quite recently, for practical and convenient purposes, it has been divided into five wards, — two at the south, one at the east, one at the Landing, and one at the north. Until 1793, Weymouth constituted a part of Suffolk County, but in that year Norfolk County was established and Weymouth made a part of it. It has four post-offices, one in each

<sup>1</sup> The following from the town record was copied from the General Court records: "A General Court holden at Boston the 7th day of 10th mo. A. D. 1636.

"Round Island and Grape Island are granted to the Towne of Weymouth."



of the principal villages, with telegraphic and telephone accommodations along the lines of the Old Colony and South Shore Railroads, which cross the town at different points.

**GEOLOGY.**<sup>1</sup> — Weymouth, geologically, is a very ancient town. The solid rock formations date far back in the primitive ages, and its physical history, could it be told in detail, would be extremely interesting. The rock underlying a large portion of the town is closely allied to the famous granite beds of its near neighbor, Quincy, but is less perfectly crystallized. This bed rock is everywhere pierced by veins of amygdaloid trap, often many feet in width. Belonging to a later period are beds of dark slate or shale, extending across the northerly part of the town from Braintree to Hingham, and cropping out upon the surface in huge seams at frequent intervals. These slates contain large quantities of iron pyrites, and are cut by quartz veins in which are found fine crystals. There is also found in North Weymouth another peculiar purplish slate which is full of cavities that seem once to have been filled with organic matter.

After the very early period in which these rocks were formed, there comes a great gap in the record of this earth history as written by the pen of nature, until the glacial or ice period is reached, of which Weymouth bears abundant and very marked testimony. The uncovered ledges are in many places very plainly scarred with the parallel groovings or *striæ*, and the surface is covered with hills of gravel and sand, or strewn with boulders of great variety and of all sizes up to that of an ordinary dwelling-house.

<sup>1</sup> The geological portion of the sketch was furnished by Rev. George Wallace Shaw, formerly principal of the North High School, Weymouth, now Congregationalist minister in Athol, Dakota, probably the best acquainted of any one with the subject, having given it a great deal of attention.



In various parts of the town, particularly in the north, bordering upon Back River, are unusually fine examples of the sharp, linea hills, called horsebacks or kames, and glacial plains, both formed by the ice as it melted or retreated towards the pole.

The hilly, rolling surface of Weymouth, especially in the northerly portion, is due partly to the upturned ledges of granite, and partly to these hills of glacial gravel. But little soil is left upon the rocky, gravelly hills, most of the vegetable *débris* having been washed into the swamps and peat-bogs.

**GENERAL HISTORY.** — The history of the town of Weymouth covers a period of two hundred and sixty-one years, and is no less fruitful in important and stirring events than that of any of its contemporaries. The early voyagers were attracted to it by its beautiful and protected situation, shielded from the ocean by the beach and peninsula of Nantasket, and from the Indians by its position extending far into the bay, between the two rivers. Its central location made it also easy of access both by water and land from a large reach of territory, thus rendering it a favorable point for trade with the natives. The wandering fishermen and traders, who were ranging the New England coast during the early years of the seventeenth century, soon discovered its value and made it a point of rendezvous. From it they could easily slip out upon the ocean, and from it they could make such excursions upon the land as were necessary in accomplishing their purposes.

The great companies were then looking for the men and the places by whom and where they could carry out their grand schemes, accumulate the fortunes and seize the honors they foresaw already within their grasp; and, not more scrupulous than some of their modern successors, they were not always as careful as to the means



by which their purposes were to be accomplished as might be desired. Land was here in abundance, and its rightful owners, if there were any, were few, ignorant, and of no fixed abode. The geography of the coast was not well understood; and it easily happened that conflicts of jurisdiction arose between the various claimants that caused, in after-times, no little vexation and trouble. If the various grants came in conflict, the boundaries were not well defined, and a fine position near the border, once in possession, might perhaps be held against future comers. It was a great distance from the courts that held jurisdiction, and influences might be brought to bear even upon those high in authority that would render the result of a trial anything but certain. Justice was tardy, her eyes liable to partial blindness, and her hand held the scales in uncertain poise. Thus the position of things prepared the way for a train of events involving a great deal of disturbance and perplexity, and the result was usually in favor of those holding the most money and home influence.

Such was the condition of affairs during the first quarter of the seventeenth century. The Virginia Company, whose patent covered the southern portion of the English possessions in America, established at Jamestown, Va., in 1607, a colony which commenced a long and severe struggle for existence. In 1614 the Dutch began a settlement on Manhattan Island, at the mouth of the Hudson,—an entering wedge between the two portions of the continent claimed by England,—and seven years later, at the close of the year 1620, the Plymouth Company, after much discussion and bargaining, invited the Pilgrims (then temporarily living in Leyden, Holland), to embark for the coast of New England, and the colony located at Plymouth, where the resolute members of that community commenced their hand-to-hand conflict with the terrible circumstances



against them, and which proved almost too great for their strength.

THE WESTON COLONY.<sup>1</sup> — Thus it was that Mr. Thomas Weston, a merchant of London, who had much to do with the Pilgrims in their negotiations with the Plymouth Company, and with an exalted opinion of the value and future prosperity of the country, conceived the idea of an independent enterprise of similar character, which should unite in itself all the elements of success without cumbering itself with the discouragements that surrounded the other settlement. They would establish a trading post by men without families which should afterwards grow up into a powerful state. Consequently in August, 1622, a company of about sixty able-bodied men, selected — not so much for their special fitness for the work proposed as for their willingness to undertake it — from the migratory population of London, landed from the "Charity" and "Swan," two small vessels chartered for the purpose, upon the shore of Wessaguscus, about twenty-five miles north of Plymouth, inside of the entrance of a capacious bay, afterwards known as Boston Harbor. The spot has not been positively identified, but tradition points to the northern shore of Phillips Creek, a small inlet of Fore River (or Monati-quot), about three or four miles from its entrance into the bay, — a well-protected, well-wooded and watered

<sup>1</sup> For further details of the first companies that came to Weymouth, the reader is referred to the address of Charles Francis Adams, Jr., Esq., delivered at the 250th anniversary of the settlement of Weymouth, celebrated July 4, 1874, and the authorities quoted in it. Also to his article read before the Massachusetts Historical Society and published in its papers, entitled "Early Planters about Massachusetts Bay," "Winslow's Good Newes," "Young's Chronicles of the Pilgrims," "Phineas Pratt's Narrative," "Gov. Bradford's History," "Levett's Voyage," "Morton's New English Canaan," "Force's Historical Tracts," and other easily accessible authorities.



spot, and one that promised well for the business proposed.

As might have been expected, this company, with no settled habits of industry and no extraordinary inducements to form them now, not well disposed towards the hard labor and deprivations necessary to the formation of a settlement in a new and rugged country, and without a competent head, soon became disgusted with their enterprise, neglected their means of livelihood, broke over the comparatively friendly relations upon which they had subsisted with the natives, and were soon in great distress. The severity of the winter, and their neglect to make provisions for it, in a short time brought them to the point of starvation. Their treatment of their savage neighbors rendered them in the utmost degree distrustful and timid. In their want of food they sent to their neighbors at Plymouth for supplies, but they, nearly as badly off, could not help them; thus the fish of the sea, the shell-fish of the beaches, and the nuts and fruits of the forest, became their sole food. In their great fear of the Indians they applied to Plymouth for assistance, and that colony sent up Capt. Miles Standish with a file of men, who speedily established order in the death of the principal aggressors. Meanwhile, fully satisfied with their brief experiment of colonial life, the Weston Colony disbanded, going in different directions, and at the opening of the summer of 1623 not one was left upon the spot to claim ownership in the name of the ill-fated company.<sup>1</sup>

Ten of the colony died of famine, two had been killed

<sup>1</sup> This company was under the leadership of Richard Greene, a brother-in-law of Mr. Weston, who, dying, was succeeded by John Sanders. There were also in this company a lawyer named Salisbury, and the afterwards notorious Thomas Morton, of Merry Mount. The whole company consisted of about sixty men, gathered from London and vicinity. — *Adams's Address.*



and one wounded by the savages in their various encounters, and at the close of the spring, after the visit of Capt. Standish, three of their number, the last of the company, were cruelly tortured to death by their Indian neighbors with whom they had sought refuge.<sup>1</sup> After the lapse of more than two and a half centuries, it may be possible to form a more favorable estimate of the character of the men who composed this colony than that which has been usually accredited to them. That they were not the utterly depraved set they have been described is very evident. In their intercourse with the Plymouth people they certainly showed a disposition to act fairly. In an expedition made with them under contract to trade with the Indians to the south, in the region of Cape Cod, Mr. Weston's people took their full share of the labor and privation, acting with energy and honorably discharging all their obligations.<sup>2</sup> Even their associates in this enterprise offer no complaints in this respect. When one of their number had shown himself a notorious thief, and had committed serious depredations upon their Indian neighbors, he was given up at their complaint, and, as the sufferers declined to judge the culprit, the colonists proceeded to execute summary justice by hanging him. It may be said that this act was the result of fear, but it is hardly fair to ascribe a dishonorable motive when a better one appears in the exhibition of it. They had not that high moral purpose, neither were they actuated by that strong religious faith, that governed their Pilgrim contemporaries. They were not flying from persecution in their own land to seek a home for themselves and their families, where they could enjoy comparative freedom of conscience

<sup>1</sup> Phineas Pratt's narrative in Massachusetts Historical Society's Collection, Ser. 4, Vol. IV.

<sup>2</sup> Gov. E. Winslow's Relation, Massachusetts Historical Society's Collection, Ser. 4, Vol. IV.



and life, at the expense of most of life's comforts. They were men with no families, who undertook the enterprise to earn a living, and, it may be, make a fortune with which to return home. More than this, they were under no competent leadership, Mr. Weston remaining behind, and his agent intrusted with the charge of the colony during its early days dying in a short time. Had they come with families dependent upon them, with the result resting upon their own exertions, the issue might have been different. Their faults seem to have come from the want of proper training with its consequent improvidence, and the lack of a sufficient motive.

**GORGES'S SETTLEMENT.**—The natural attractions of Wessagusset did not suffer it to remain long unoccupied, for in the autumn of the same year, 1623,<sup>1</sup> or in the late summer, it is not quite certain which, Capt. Robert Gorges, son of Sir Fernando Gorges, acting under a charter from the Plymouth Company, the Council of New England, came with a company consisting, in part, at least, of families and of character superior to that of those who had preceded them, with the evident intention of forming a permanent settlement. They landed upon the northern part of the town, probably near or upon the spot chosen by the Weston people the year before, thinking, undoubtedly, that this was covered by the grant which was so indefinitely described as to be easily susceptible of misconstruction. This gave them ten miles of the coast on the northeast side of Massachusetts Bay and extending thirty miles inland. They chose their ten miles evidently to include the entrance to

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Adams says about the middle of September. In Sir Fernando Gorges's description of New England, he says, "my son arrived [at Wessagusset] about the beginning of August, 1623." — *Massachusetts Historical Collection*, Ser. 3, Vol. VI. p. 74.



Boston Harbor; and this mistake, if mistake it were, was the cause of much trouble in the future.

The leader of this company is well known in history, but of the men who composed it little has been recorded; even their number is not known, the names of very few being mentioned, and those with a great deal of uncertainty.<sup>1</sup>

It is, however, a well-ascertained fact that the colony was projected to favor the establishment of the government more firmly on the New England shore, and to prepare a foundation upon which the Episcopacy might rear its future prosperity, and also as an offset to the threatened opposition that might possibly arise from the then insignificant attempt at Plymouth. The project, therefore, carried upon its face the evidence of ministerial and ecclesiastical favor; hence it did not meet with much assistance from the Pilgrims, from whom there have come not the most favorable reports. To further the authority of the Church and to form a legal basis of future action, the colony brought a regular chaplain or clergyman of the Church of England, in the person of Rev. William Morrell, a man of education and standing, of excellent character, with power sufficient for the purpose intrusted to his care, the establishment of the claims of the Church in the wilderness, and also to act as its bishop when the enterprise should develop sufficiently to need the services of such an officer.

The plan of the colony was projected upon a scale of magnificent proportions and with machinery sufficient to conduct the affairs of an empire. Capt. Gorges was named as governor-general, with a general oversight of the company's officers in America, and authority by commission to carry out his plans. Associated with him in the government were Capt. Francis West, ad-

<sup>1</sup> See "Early Planters about Massachusetts Bay," by C. F. Adams, Jr., Esq.



miral, Christopher Levet, Esq., perhaps the chief judicial officer, and such others as the governor-general chose to appoint, any two of whom, with himself, were empowered to transact any business necessary for the government of the colony. The governor of Plymouth, for the time being, was constituted a member of the government, and immediately upon the arrival of the company, in August or September, Gov. Bradford was notified of the fact, and at once made his arrangements to make the new-comers a call; but before this could be effected, the governor-general, while on a tour of inspection over his extended domains, was forced by stress of weather into Plymouth, where he remained a few days, and then returned overland to Wessaguscus. Very soon, however, he became satisfied with his experience as a ruler in the new settlement and returned to England with a considerable portion of his company; others of the party went to Virginia, and some to Plymouth, while some remained as the nucleus of the future settlement. Mr. Morrell appears to have remained here for perhaps a year and a half, and despairing of an accomplishment of his purpose in coming hither, went to Plymouth and took passage for England.<sup>1</sup>

In the course of the year 1624, there came in other settlers from Weymouth, England, bringing with them a non-conformist minister by the name of Barnard, who remained with them and died there. The records of this time are so bare and scanty that nothing more than the fact of this addition is known. From this time until the arrival of Gov. Winthrop at Shawmut, there is more or less mention of the settlement at Wessaguscus, and a continual though small accession to its members. The most notorious event of this period was the

<sup>1</sup> Bradford and Hazard.



arrest there, in 1628, of Thomas Morton, of Merry Mount, as Mount Wollaston was then called, by Capt. Miles Standish, by the order of the Plymouth authorities, taken to that town, and sent to England.<sup>1</sup> In 1630 and the following years, the settlement was recognized as a part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and taxed for its support.<sup>2</sup> In 1632, Gov. Winthrop, with a party of friends, visited Plymouth, by vessel to Wessaguscus or Wessagusset (it was called by either name), thence overland. On their way in going and returning they were generously entertained by the people of that place.<sup>3</sup> During that year a tax was ordered by the Court, five pounds of which was levied on Wessaguscus, eight on Boston, and four pounds ten shillings on Salem, showing the relative importance of the towns.<sup>4</sup> In 1633 it was spoken of as a small village.<sup>5</sup> In 1634 it was ordered to pay the charges incurred in taking care of Thomas Lane, a servant of John Burslyn (Bursley), of that settlement, who had fallen sick in Dorchester.<sup>6</sup>

**HULL COMPANY.** — In 1635 the place came into general notice and took a prominent position among the towns composing the Massachusetts Bay Colony. On the 8th of July, of that year, the General Court passed an order permitting Rev. Joseph Hull, with twenty-one families, consisting of about one hundred persons, to settle at Wessaguscus, — the largest addition at any one time probably in the history of the town. These settlers came from Weymouth, England, and belonged to

<sup>1</sup> Bradford's Letter Book, Massachusetts Historical Collection, Ser. 1, Vol. III. p. 61; Morton's New English Canaan.

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Colonial Records, Sept. 28, 1630; also for the following years.

<sup>3</sup> Savage's Winthrop, Vol. I. p. 192.

<sup>4</sup> Massachusetts Colonial Records, Feb. 3, 1631-2.

<sup>5</sup> Wood's New England Prospect; Young's Chronicles, p. 394.

<sup>6</sup> Massachusetts Colonial Records.



the county of Dorset and its immediate neighborhood.<sup>1</sup> They were a class of people who soon became prominent, and whose families, many of them, retain their position at the present day. Their minister, Rev. Joseph Hull, became for a time the minister of the town. On the 2d of September, the town was erected into a plantation, equivalent, probably, to an act of incorporation, and the name changed to Weymouth, which it has since retained.<sup>2</sup> On the following day it was ordered to send a deputy to the General Court, to which office William Reade, John Bursley, and John Upham were elected, these three being sent as an accommodation to three strong, opposing elements then existing in the town, consisting, probably, of those who remained of the Gorges Company and friends who followed them, those who came in from other towns in the colony with an interest centring in the capital, and a third, embracing those who came with Rev. Joseph Hull and their sympathizers; John Bursley representing the first, William Reade the second, and John Upham the third. The court influence predominating, Mr. Reade was retained and the others were permitted to retire. During the years 1635 and 1636, commissioners were appointed to establish the bounds between Mount Wollaston and Weymouth, of which Fore River and the Smelt Brook formed a part, thence by a straight line running south a little westerly, until it reached the line of Plymouth Colony; also, between Weymouth and Bare Cove, afterwards Hingham, of which line Back River and a creek called Fresh River formed a part, thence on a line nearly parallel with the western boundary to the Plymouth Colony line. These bounds, which were the more ancient ones re-established, have remained to the present time with little if any change.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts General Court Records, 1635.

<sup>3</sup> Massachusetts General Court Records, 1635.



Ferries had already been erected, connecting the town with its neighbors on either hand, and bridges were projected for the better accommodation of traffic and travel. Roads were built towards Boston, and mills erected upon the streams. A quarterly court was established, to be held in Boston, to which Roxbury, Dorchester, Weymouth, and Hingham belonged; and for the better protection of the various towns in the colony from the Indians, it was ordered by the General Court that no dwelling-house should be built more than half a mile from the meeting-house.<sup>1</sup> It appears, however, that the latter order was never enforced, or soon became a dead letter, for at this time the people of Weymouth were scattered over a territory from two to three miles in extent. The larger part of the population lived in North Weymouth, commonly known as "Old Spain," extending from the shore of the bay to Burying Hill, more than a mile, while there were quite a number of plantations extending south and east over King Oak Hill as far as Fresh Pond, now Whitman's, in East Weymouth.

Where the first meeting-house was built is unknown, but tradition says in Old Spain, probably near what is now the centre of the village; but this did not long remain, giving place to a more commodious building which stood upon Burying Hill, near where North Street now passes through it. This remained until 1682, when a third was erected upon the spot now occupied by the meeting-house of the First Parish. The houses of the inhabitants were mostly rude structures built of logs, and thatched with the coarse grass found at the head of the beaches above the salt water, which was carefully preserved for the purpose by order of the town.<sup>2</sup> In 1642, April 26, the Indian title to the town was extinguished by purchase. The original deed is not to be found, but a

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts General Court Records, 1635.

<sup>2</sup> Weymouth Town Records, 1649.



copy stands upon the records of the Suffolk County registry of deeds, and is a curious specimen of the sharp trading which the early fathers allowed themselves to indulge in when dealing with the native owners. It was signed by Wampetuck, *alias* Josias Webecowett, Nateaunt, and Nahowton, sachems.<sup>1</sup>

CHURCH TROUBLES. — During the early years of the town it was very much disturbed by internal dissensions in the church. From 1635, on the arrival of Rev. Joseph Hull and his company, until 1644, upon the settlement of Rev. Thomas Thacher, there was almost constant tumult and disturbance, sometimes so serious as to draw the attention of the General Court. About the years 1637 and 1638 there were no less than four claimants for the Weymouth pulpit, each with a strong party at his command; the old Gorges settlers, the later comers from Dorchester, Boston and vicinity, and the recent Hull arrivals, while the fourth, coming with a view of harmonizing the differences, only added another element to the discord. The Episcopal element was still strong, but apparently not enough so to propose a candidate of its own views; the Puritan party, which sustained Rev. Thomas Jenner; the 1635 settlers, under the leadership of Rev. Joseph Hull, an independent, with Episcopalian antecedents; and a strong party who had invited Rev. Robert Lenthal, who was suspected of favoring the views of Mrs. Hutchinson. Rev. Samuel Newman was summoned to heal the breach, but he found the trouble too serious for his powers. The departure of all these contestants, and the settlement of Rev. Thomas Thacher, appeared to resolve the difficulty.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This copy of the Indian deed of Weymouth is taken from the Suffolk deeds, and is also found upon the Weymouth Town Records. (See Appendix B.)

<sup>2</sup> See Ecclesiastical History, in Chapter X. of this sketch.



In December, 1636, the General Court ceded to Weymouth, Grape Island and Round Island, the only additions ever made to its territory.<sup>1</sup> During the eight years from the arrival of Rev. Joseph Hull, in 1635, to the departure of Rev. Samuel Newman, in 1643, Weymouth had gained largely in population and had become one of the most important towns in the colony. The records of the latter year, previous to the departure of Rev. Mr. Newman to Rehoboth with a large colony, estimated by some as high as forty families, contained the names of more than one hundred and thirty land-owners, representing, most of them, heads of families. These records are imperfect, and probably do not represent by many the whole number.<sup>2</sup> It is at this time that the regular records of the town commence, from which date they are comparatively good, probably as full as the average of the town records of the colony. Earlier than this the peculiar circumstances surrounding the settlement conspired to envelop the history in much obscurity. The natural jealousy of the Pilgrims against the adherents of the Established Church, from which they had suffered so much, prevented them from making any fuller record than was absolutely necessary of their neighbors at Wessagusset; and later, the Puritans at Boston were in the same condition and no better disposed, although on their own territory and under their own jurisdiction; while still later, the disturbances produced by the conflicting elements in its own midst prevented the preservation of records that would be of inestimable value at the present time.

**PEQUOD WAR.** — The Indians upon the territory of the town were never numerous from the first visits of the

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts General Court Records; Weymouth Town Records.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix C.



whites to its shores, and this was one reason for its selection as a favorable location for a settlement; yet, notwithstanding its retired position, it was not without its share of damage from its savage enemies in other parts of the province, and it was always called upon for its quota of men and taxed for its share of the expense. As early as 1637, of the one hundred and sixty men called for to serve against the Pequods, five were to come from Weymouth;<sup>1</sup> and from this time until the close of the King Philip war, in 1676, the town was always a contributor in men and money to sustain the various expeditions sent against the Indians. From that time the immediate danger was not felt, yet her soldiers were found upon the bloody fields of New York and Canada, fighting for the preservation of their homes, although so far away.

EMIGRATION.—The first large colony sent out from Weymouth was that under the charge of Rev. Samuel Newman, to Rehoboth, and numbered, by the best accounts, about forty families.<sup>2</sup> From that time, but usually in small companies, often but a single family, the tide flowed away, and the town saw its population slowly diminish by the constant drain upon it to supply the calls of the frontier. First Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and the western part of this State, Rhode Island, and Connecticut made large demands. Then followed the calls from New York and the other Middle States, and still later the vast West, which have all been abundantly answered, until not a State in the Union, and hardly a county or town, but has one or more of the sons of Weymouth to represent it. This condition of things could not fail to be seriously felt, and the town was severely crippled by it, so much so

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts General Court Records, Vol. I. pp. 174-177.

<sup>2</sup> See Bliss's History of Rehoboth.



that from 1643, for one hundred and fifty years, the gain was hardly perceptible, sometimes a period of gain to be more than offset by a corresponding period of loss, while the actual increase for the whole time was so small as to be hardly appreciable. If the estimate for 1643 of at least one hundred and fifty families be correct, and an average of six to the family a fair allowance, a population of nine hundred at that time against fourteen hundred, the estimate for 1776, will show the truth of this statement.

**TOWN GOVERNMENT.**—Like that of nearly all of the early settlements, the government of the town was of a very simple pattern. Town meetings were called as necessity demanded, at irregular intervals; and townsmen, afterwards known as selectmen, chosen at times and in number most convenient. The officers seem to have been their own recorders, since no regular clerk appears for twenty or thirty years. Meetings were notified upon training or lecture days by public call, and such business was transacted as the time demanded.<sup>1</sup> When and how the first land grants were made is not known, but probably upon the earliest settlement the lands were divided as the needs of the settlers appeared; that remaining was held in common. A large portion of the north part of the town was occupied, and as early as 1636 there is record of a division of great lots at the lower end of Fresh

<sup>1</sup> The records of the town meeting held Nov. 26, 1651, contain, quite in detail, the manner in which the town adapted itself to its changed circumstances, and adopted by-laws and regulations for its government which proved sufficient for its wants for more than a hundred and fifty years. Until this time there were only such officers elected and such business transacted as the circumstances of the occasion demanded; no clerk or assessors appear before this time; now these officers were recognized as a part of the town government, and the local business of the town assumed a regular and established form.



(Whitman's) Pond, some two or three miles from the shore of the bay.

In 1643 a partial record of the then property owners was made which has been preserved.<sup>1</sup> Most of the early records are filled with regulations respecting cattle, cutting of timber, and such public matters as seem to be called for. The earliest officers, after townsmen, named upon the records, are fence-viewers, and the number and prominence of the men appointed to this position show it to have been at least no sinecure. There was the strictest scrutiny into the character and purpose of those who came among them. As early as 1646 a vote was passed forbidding any inhabitant from taking as an inmate any stranger without giving the town an indemnity bond against damage, under a penalty of a fine of five shillings per week; nor could he sell or let to any such person house or land, without having first tendered the same to the town at a training, lecture, or other public meeting.<sup>2</sup>

During those early days frequent regulations were made for the preservation of pine and cedar, indicating a waste of that material. In 1648, Widow Hillard was required to give the town security against harm from the charges of her children. At the first settlement, the town set apart the shore land between high and low water marks for thatching purposes, thatch being at that time the most important material for roofing purposes, and there appeared to be a necessity to provide for its preservation; and when the General Court afterwards ordered that all lands to low-water mark should belong to the proprietors of the adjoining land, this regulation of the town was respected, and an exception made in its favor.<sup>3</sup>

The highways were a matter of prime importance at

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix C.

<sup>2</sup> Town Records.

<sup>3</sup> Town Records.



an early date, and as far back as 1649 the inhabitants were required to work them at the call of the "way warden," under penalty. In 1650-1, March 1, a vote was passed requiring the officers to post notices of the assessment of rates, and all persons liable to taxation were required to bring in lists of polls and property under penalty. March 10, 1651, the town voted to fine all such as should be tardy at town meetings six pence for each hour the meeting continued. The rates were to be laid so that the town bills could be promptly paid, particularly Capt. Perkins's ten pounds for six months' schooling, which is the first notice upon the record in relation to school matters.<sup>1</sup>

About this time the town business had accumulated to such a degree that it became necessary to adopt more systematic measures in relation to its conduct.

Regular meetings were to be held on the first Monday in March and the last Monday of November, for the choice of officers and general business, while unimportant matters could be regulated on lecture days without notice; and all military affairs were to be decided upon training days. The townsmen were also required to make report of the action taken at their meetings. The first annual town meeting was held Nov. 26, 1651, for the choice of town officers, and the townsmen are now for the first time called "selectmen," a title which they have since retained. The powers of these officers are given upon the record with minute detail, and the business of the town seems to have been settled upon in nearly the same form that it bears at present.

The necessity of a town clerk was apparent, and Deacon John Rogers was chosen "recorder," his special duty being that of clerk to the selectmen. At this time there is a record made of those entitled to the great lots

<sup>1</sup> Town Records.



near Whitman's Pond, numbering about sixty persons. Jan. 24, 1652-3, two thousand acres were set apart as town commons, running across the town from Braintree to Hingham, and near the centre from north to south; at the same time Thomas Dyer was chosen to record births, deaths, and marriages, and William Torrey recorder of deeds, etc. The town records seem at this time to have been in two divisions, each with its clerk, one for the personal and the other for the general record. In 1663 there is a record of the names, number of lot and acres, of each person who was allotted land in the first and second divisions, beginning on Braintree line.<sup>1</sup> (See Appendix C.)

For many years the records are mainly taken up with domestic matters, regulations for cattle, running boundary lines with other and adjacent towns and between different estates, locating and improving the highways, and managing the town commons, which was a matter of no small moment in those days. The sexton's duties were prescribed and looked after, and all parish matters, neither few nor small, were transacted by the town in public meeting, since the town and precinct were one.

As early as 1667 there was found a necessity to enlarge the capacity of the meeting-house, the seating showing a gradual increase in population. At the same time there was an increased call upon the town clerk in the matter of recording grants, and for copying, so large as to demand compensation, which was voted at the rate of one shilling for grants, six pence for a copy, and three shillings four pence for recording the assessors' rates.<sup>2</sup>

In 1668, Lieut. Holbrook was appointed with full powers to answer the "presentment" of the General Court in relation to the highways.

<sup>1</sup> Town Records.

<sup>2</sup> Town Records.



At the March meeting, 1669-70, a committee was chosen to procure a "new town book," upon which all of the affairs of the town should be correctly kept, and it is not at all unlikely that the oldest book of records now in possession of the town is the identical book purchased at this time, since in it are references to older books not now to be found.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Town Records.