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Thomsons were First NH Settlers in 1623

Written by J. Dennis Robinson

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The End of the Beginning

Within a year of his arrival at Rye, David Thomson was touring the untamed harbor at Boston where he had his eye on an island of 157 acres off modern day Dorchester. He likely built a house on the eastern end of "Thompson Island" around 1625 or 1626. The stone foundation, discovered in the 19th century, has since eroded into the harbor. According to some accounts, son John Thomson [Thompson] was born at Pannaway in 1625. Other writers speculate that John was born in England, or that the Thomsons had already moved to Boston by the year he was born.

David may also have helped his unmarried friend Samuel Maverick build a house on Noddle's Island nearby in Boston Harbor. Thomson wrote a lengthy intimate letter to the Earl of Arundel around this time complaining about the sale of guns to the Indians by colonists. This may be a reference to the infamous Thomas Morton of Merry Mount, a Massachusetts neighbor. Morton was a free-thinking colonist who considered the Puritans, who were arriving in larger numbers, to be oppressive tyrants. Morton later wrote that David Thomson was an adventurer with much knowledge of the Natives and "a man of good judgment". The Puritans, in turn, considered Morton to be a Royalist agitator and later arrested him for trading guns and ammunition to the Indians and for lewd and heathenish behavior, including dancing naked around a maypole.

By 1626, the Thomsons appear to have abandoned the trading post at Pannaway to the fishermen and fur traders in favor of the more fertile island in Massachusetts. By the close of 1627 David Thomson was dead.

Because Thomson was a staunch Royalist, amateur historians have hinted that his early death may have been the result of foul play. The settlers at Plymouth also had dibs on Thompson Island. And Thomson apparently hoped to get a patent for valuable land at Cape Ann, also attractive to the Plymouth colonists. But his dealings with Plymouth appear to have been



largely amiable and commercial. He knew the region and the Indians better than most and served as consultant and guide. In what must have been New England's first yard sale, Thomson reportedly accompanied Plymouth founders William Bradford and Edward Winslow to Monhegan Island where the goods and livestock from a failed colony were being auctioned off. Most likely, despite the heady religious and political rivalries of the era, David Thomson died from accident or illness.

Ignored by NH

A widow alone in a strange land, Amias Cole Thomson married Samuel Maverick within a year of her husband's death. Their Church of England nuptials, some suggest, was the first religious wedding ceremony in New England. (For Puritans, marriage was a civil contract.) Amias moved from Thompson Island to Maverick's fortified home in Chelsea, and then to Maverick's second house on Noddles Island --, the one her first husband may have helped build and now the site of Logan Airport. .

Amias Maverick failed to retain her property for her young son. Thompson Island was quickly claimed by Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1631, just as the Strawberry Banke colonists were settling in on the Piscataqua. John Thomson went on to captain his own fishing boats. Using his father's 1622 patent from the Council of New England, he was eventually able to prove his title to Thompson Island in 1650. A few years later, however, John lost the property when it was seized for an unpaid debt. When a Native American petitioned the court a few years later claiming that white settlers had stolen the island that was his birthright, he was not even granted a hearing. Thompson Island became home to a boy's preparatory academy in 1814. Today it is home to an Outward Bound program.

John Thomson went on to become a founder and prominent citizen of Mendon, Massachusetts. When Native Americans burned Mendon in 1675, Thomson was among the first settlers to return and rebuild. History strongly suggests that John Thomson was the first Englishman born in New Hampshire and, therefore, the first white settler born in Portsmouth. Thomson apparently never tried to reclaim his parent's property at Pannaway. He died at Mendon in 1685.

Ignored by history, obscured by time, the Thomsons get no respect around here, except perhaps, in the dusty chronicles of Rye. In his 1905 history of the town, author Langdon Brown Parsons reminded us that it was the Thomsons of Rye-- not John Mason, not the Laconia Company, and not the early arrivals at Strawberry Banke -- who give Portsmouth the right to loudly proclaim it was "settled in 1623".

SOURCES: (1) *History of the Town of Rye, New Hampshire* (1905) by Langdon Brown Parsons; (2) "David Thomson, Scottish Founder of New Hampshire" (2003 online articles) by Genevieve Cora Fraser; (3) "Notes on the First Planting of NH and on the Piscataqua Patents" (1895 pamphlet) by John Scribner Jenness; (4) *The First Yankee* (1979) by Ralph and Matthew Thompson; (5) *History of New Hampshire* (1896) by John Norris McClintock (6) *The Four Thompsons of Boston Harbor* (1966) by Raymond W. Stanley.

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