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Chester is beautifully situated at a junction of valleys, and wears an air of appealing gentility over broad streets shaded by old maple trees. A long slender green splits the Main Street, and gracious homes of wood, brick, and stone are set back on smooth lawns.

The First Baptist Church (1835), a large structure in cherry-red brick, looms over the stone-walled graveyard which flanks the street with a somber aspect. A pale green Colonial House adds a distinguished touch, and the western end of the village street is colored by homes of red brick and patterned stone. The Big white Congregational Church 1829 carries a tower of Bulfinch adaptation, suggesting the Wren traditions in architecture. While not striving to become a major winter sports center, Chester, lying in the heavy snow belt of Vermont, has provided fine ski trails and ran, a ski tow, toboggan slide, ski jump, and skating rink, and has for many years welcomed small parties of skiers. During the 1930's, to the joy of visitors and village folk, an annual winter carnival has been held here.


Today in the Whiting Library just east of the Green in Chester, it is possible to find a wonderful old book that is one of a series, published in 1891 by a Mrs. Carrie Page of Brandon, Vermont. As well as giving an overall view of the history locally, nationally, and internationally, it also pinpoints some rather colorful characters who played their part in seeking to have Chester become the shiretown of the emerging Cumberland County. The title of the book is Historical Gazetteer, Volume Five, and it was written by Hon. G. A. Davis of Windsor, VT.

In Chapter I the controversy between New Hampshire and New York regarding the New Hampshire Grants is presented. Through the mid-1700's, the provincial governments of New York



The old Magic of Stone Houses in Chester, 1890's

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Friends & Family at the Hadley House, now Hugging Bear Inn, 1895

and New Hampshire were in what began as a verbal battle over which province had rightful control over the territory that now makes up the State of Vermont. Our story really starts in 1664, when Charles II, King of England, granted the Duke of York, his brother, "all the lands from the west side of the Connecticut River to the east side of Delaware Bay." The Province of New York became the occupant of this grant. In 1741, Benning Wentworth was commissioned governor of the Province of New Hampshire. Because of the interpretation of the wording of his commission of the territory he was to govern over, Wentworth began issuing grants in lands west of the Connecticut River. Almost immediately, the governor of the Province of New York began contesting these grants. In 1749, the governors wrote letters back and forth to each other disputing their respective borders. After a few months of both parties failing to agree with each other, they agreed to refer the matter to his majesty, the King of England. Nothing was resolved until 1764. By that time George II had died, and George III was the king. His attempts to solve the problem only resulted in more difficulties and ill-feeling.

During the pending controversy before the king, Governor Wentworth was by no means idle. By December 1763, 122 grants had been made. When news of this reached Governor Colden, without waiting any longer for word from the king, he issued his own proclamation.

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Anyone who held lands under the New Hampshire Grants westward of the Connecticut River, risked breaking the laws of New York and losing their lands. When this news reached the ears of the settlers who had paid for their claims, they were very upset. Gov. Wentworth issued a counter proclamation March 13, 1764 in order to inspire confidence and validity in his grants and discredit the New York Governor and his actions. The matter finally came before the king, but the wording of his decision was not clear and caused even more contention. Gov.



The Old Hotel 1872-Rebuilt to be The Fullerton Inn

Colden believed the king had ruled in his favor, and as such ordered new charters for the settlers in the territory in question. Some of the settlers agreed to pay for the new grants. Others did not and more trouble followed.

In 1765 the land that now makes up the town of Chester was known as New Flamstead, derived from the very old town of Flamstead in Hertfordshire, England. The name meant "refuge or sanctuary."

Thomas Chandler and Issac Mann, who lived here in one of the settlements west of the Connecticut River, met with Daniel Jones and Robert Harper to try and convince the Provincial Legislature of New York to form a county east of the Green Mountains with New Flamstead as the shire town. Even though their efforts failed, early in 1766, Chandler was requested by the new Governor of New York, Sir Henry Moore, to count up the number of men that lived between the Green Mountains and the Connecticut River, who were capable of bearing arms. Chandler located 600. Military companies were formed in the different towns and commissions issued. On January 20, 1766, Thomas Chandler was commissioned Colonel.

New Flamstead found itself furnished with a full complement of officers, judicial, executive and military, and some good results were seen.

(Continued on the other side)

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(Continued from the other side)

The biggest problem at the time was the lack of a satisfactory jail "for the confinement of evil doers." The jail at Albany was a 150 miles away, and the roads to travel there were in poor condition. The attempts to secure the formation of a county were again renewed by Chandler and others, on the 16th of June, 1766. Governor Moore seconded their efforts, and on the 3rd of July a portion of the "Grants" situated between the Connecticut River and the summit of the Green Mountains, comprising the same territory now included within the limits of Windham and Windsor counties, was formed into a county by the name of Cumberland. It probably received its name from Prince William, the Duke of Cumberland, who in 1746 had met with distinguished success in opposing the rebels in Scotland.



The Old Chester Depot complete with the Band, 1885

Provisions were made for the building of a courthouse and jail. New Flamstead being the most convenient among the townships, and "nearest the centre of the county," was selected as the location of these buildings. On the 14th of July, a new charter was obtained for New Flamstead by Thomas Chandler and 36 others, in which the town took the name of Chester. It confirmed the settlers in the quiet possession of their farms, and saved Chester from becoming the theater of contests between the people and civil authority of New York.

The following is an historical sketch of Chester, written by Andrew Ojanen, Trustee of the Chester Historical Society:

Our town was founded three times; twice by the Royal Governor of the Province of New Hampshire, Benning Wentworth. He issued his first grant for the town of Flamstead in February,

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Chester The Stone Village



A Gathering of Civil War Soldiers 1885



1754, but no settlement was attempted. There was still more French and Indian War to fight. The second grant was issued on November 3rd, 1761 as the war was drawing to a close. The name of this grant was New Flamstead. By 1764 settlement had started with the arrival of the families of Thomas Chandler, Sr. and Jabez Sargeant, Sr. Several other families soon followed.

To carry on with this short review, in 1765 King George III issued a decree, defining the western boundary of New Hampshire as being at the west shore line of the Connecticut River. New Flamstead sent a delegation to Albany, New York, and on July 14, 1766, the Royal Governor, who was at this time, William Tryon, issued a charter under the name Chester. The town, unquestionably, was named for the eldest son of George III, George Augustus Frederick, the Earl of Chester.

As already mentioned, in 1770 Cumberland County was formed with Chester being the shiretown with Judge Thomas Chandler presiding. A census was taken in 1771 of the county. Chester had a population of 152 with 30 households, although not 30 families.

"Why did people move here?" Perhaps the question should be: "Why did they leave where they were?" Phillip Grevens book "THE FIRST FOUR GENERATIONS" is about Andover, Massachusetts that was founded in 1640. The population had increased to the point where all the resources of the town were over utilized - the forests, lands, and water power. The fourth generation was not living as well as their grandparents. For this reason, families and individuals left to seek undeveloped land and also to find husbands and wives who were not related.

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Chester had lots of resources. Uncut forests provided ash and oak for building. Clearing the land provided farming country. Sides streams, such as Stoney Brook, provided water power both in North Village and South Village.

The population of Chester slowly grew. Young families came. Soldiers looking for wives came. Daniel Ranney's sister, Silence, married Ensign Amos Gile, and Daniel married Eunice Gile. Elijah Parker, who had served with Daniel, married Mary, the daughter of Captain George Earle.

Chester, like so many towns in New England, had a "Declaration of Independence" in October 1774. If you study this history closely, you would discover that it was actually a "Declaration of Civil Disobedience." Among other things, it read: "I pledge my life, my fortune, and my sacred honor to defend the United Colonies."

The population of Chester in 1791 was 800. The early 1800's saw the Clark family using local rock to build the houses on North Street. Clay was being quarried and a kiln was producing soft red brick. The Chester Academy was built in 1814 of brick and so were a lot of other houses, too. John Polley built a felting mill in town. At this time there were a lot of families moving in and moving out.

By 1850, the Rutland Railroad was running. Chester Depot became a stopping off point for traveling sales representatives, who would book rooms in the local hotels, rent horses and carriages and travel from Chester to the surrounding communities.

The Civil War was the most dramatic event of Chester's history. Three hundred men left for the war. Fifty didn't come back. The better part of those that did return suffered disease and chronic illness.

Chester also became a shipping and receiving market. For the next century, the variety of products increased. Talc, hemlock bark, pulp wood, clothing, furniture, boxes, dairy and poultry products were in abundance.

As late as 1937, visitors coming to Chester for summertime beauty or to enjoy outdoor winter sports, leave the train at the little Depot.

Special thanks to the great folks at the Whiting Library and Andrew Ojanen, Trustee of the Chester Historical Society and Historian of the American Legion Post 67.



The Chester Depot Railroad Station, 1890

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