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On the 29th day of April in 1751, when what is now known as the United States was largely owned by France and Spain, King George, II of England ruled the colonies along the eastern coast of North America. Among these colonies was the Province of New Hampshire and the Province of New York. Vermont was non-existent except that these rugged hills sloped down to placid lakes which mirrored virgin forests and wild creatures that came to drink. Men, stalwart men only, from the Massachusetts Bay and the Connecticut provinces had explored this wilderness and some had decided to come here to settle. In consequence, on the 29th of April in 1751 a charter, the third of its kind of the New Hampshire Grants, was issued by Benning Wentworth, the Governor of the Province of New Hampshire, granting a tract of land six miles square to be known as Wilmington, to fifty-nine "Loving Subjects" as they were called in the Charter and who were also known as Proprietors.



Lyman and Norton Houses and 1836 Country Store

Originally the settlers were centered on Lisle Hill, and in 1780 the desire for a permanent house of worship and town hall led to the building of a meeting house on the hill. A document found describing the initial decision is dated 1781, but this must be an error since other records make it abundantly clear that the log building was erected and used in 1780.

The second meeting house was a frame structure 53 by 40 with galleries. The fact that this building was designed with galleries is substantiated by several deeds of record between pew owners, pews being sold on the "lower floor" and in the "galleries."

This building erected in 1786 was used for town meeting until 1833. A new building was constructed with a cost to the town of \$200 plus \$10 for the building lot. In the early 1950s this same building had become the Post Office.

There is good reason to believe there was more than one store in Wilmington before 1800. The population as of that year was 1,011. Although there is some question, it is reasonable to believe that the first store was operated and, for a time, owned by John Iselstine. It seems that a Dr. Russell Fitch came here from Brattleboro around 1815. He did not practice much medicine to any great extent, but engaged in merchandising. At first Mr. Iselstine ran the store. In the 1820s it was known as Russell Fitch's Store, and a cash book kept by Russell during 1826-27 has been saved over the years.

(Continued on the other side)

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In 1771, twenty years later, these "Loving Subjects" had settled in town and increased so that the population was 71 people. It came as a big surprise that in 1763, another Charter had been issued by the same Governor Wentworth. This time the town was called Draper and the same six square miles were granted to 67 more "Loving Subjects."

It should come as no surprise that much of the love began to fade between themselves and their King, when the error was discovered. The land among these beautiful hills was being sold by the Proprietors of Wilmington

to one party and by the Proprietors of Draper to another. Is there any wonder that there was no love lost between a rugged individualist who had bought and paid for the same one hundred acres of land, made a clearing and built a cabin, only to have another rugged individualist who had bought and paid for the same one hundred acres come along and claim it? Then, too, there was the little matter that each was paying taxes on the same property!

This little matter caused big problems with the King and his representatives. Governor Benning Wentworth apparently did not believe the Wilmington Proprietors fulfilled the conditions of their proprietorship.

It was not until 1794 that peace was finally declared between the Proprietors of Wilmington and the Proprietors of Draper.

It is recorded in the second book of Proprietors that a meeting was held on October 8, 1794, at which allotments were made to landowners of all the lots in the town. The grants under the Wilmington Charter were in most cases upheld and declared legal.

In the meantime, surveyors Jonas Locke and Phineas Munn had laid out the First Division of Lots. That was in 1769, and had been used by both the Proprietors of Wilmington and Draper.



The Vermont House as it appeared in 1864



Under the banner of his HQ Colors, General John Stark is said to have told his loyal troops, "Today we will win this battle or tomorrow Molly lies a widow." In the early part of the 1900s, Vermont Route 9 was named the Molly Stark Trail in honor of Elizabeth (Molly) Stark. The Stark Flag was marched through Bennington after the battle, and today it has been reproduced so that people will fly it between Bennington and Brattleboro on the Molly Stark Trail.

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The accounts in the book give evidence that Russell Fitch's store dealt extensively in the sale of gin, rum and brandy. On good authority it may be reported that Russell's sales were curtailed to some extent by what he consumed himself. That he died an untimely death at the age of 47 with his head in a nail keg, leads one to wonder why this happened. It might be a gesture of kindness to state that the records indicate that his finances became quite involved the year before he was found in such a sad condition.

Back in the 50s, if you were to stroll about the old village, you would find markers where some of the first houses stood prior to 1833. Next to the site of the Old Common, if you know where to look, are two such markers - cellar holes. One is probably Russell Fitch's store and the other is his house. On the back of the lot is the foundation of what at first was referred to as a blacksmith shop but later as a store house.

Across the road from the store was the Union Building used as the Masonic Hall. There was also a house near the Union Building which was owned by a Dr. Pulsifer in 1833.

Beyond the store are a couple more cellar holes. These probably mark the house and barn of David Dickinson. An acre of land was bought up with eight acres across the road and became known as the Flagg Farm. It was first owned by Orson Flagg and later by Jonathan Flagg.

Jairus Hall was the Town Clerk from 1791 to 1832. His 41 years of service, has exceeded any other town clerk before or since in Wilmington.



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The old steam engine of the HT & W - The Hitch, Twich and Wiggle, as it was known by its riders

Jairus bought a piece of property near to the Flagg Farm from Adnah Bangs in May 1796. As Adnah ran a tavern for many years, it is thought that this was the site of Bangs' Tavern before that date.

Further up the hill from the Hall Place, in the 50s, was known as the Lisle Place. It was owned by Mrs. Grace W. Harvey since 1934. This house is still standing (the barn has been moved away). It was greatly improved by Rev. William Lisle after he bought it in 1908. Lusius Fox lived here for some time before he sold it in 1866. This house was apparently built and occupied by Rev. Winslow Packard, first settling minister in the town. He bought the land from Levi Packard in December 1781, and soon after bought four adjoining pieces, the total area of which was 87 1/2 acres.

After Rev. Packard's death, his daughter, Clarissa, sold all her rights in her father's property to Origin Packard. When Origin sold the property in May 1808 for \$1,270, a goodly sum in those days, the deed described the 87 1/2 acres as the Rev. Winslow Packard Farm.

From the Old Town Common, westerly across the road which led to Captain Chipman Swift's and Levi Packard's as the road was laid out,

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you would have come to cellar holes that were covered in 1819 by buildings owned by Widow Rebecca Cummings along with 3/4 acres of land. The acreage that went with this place varied so much from time to time that it is very difficult to follow its owners, but Dr. John Pulsifer sold it to Charles K. Field in 1838 with four acres of land. It is almost certain, however that Dr. Pulsifer did not occupy the place.

The population of the town of Wilmington in 1830, three years before the "grand village exodus" was 1367 or some 200 more than the population in 1950. These people were scattered over the entire town, so it seems reasonable to expect that there were as many if not more to the square mile in Mill Hollow as there were up around the Old Meeting House.

If time could be spent on the old records, some of which have been lost, the whole truth might be unraveled, but to this day there is still a lot of debate as to the age and original location of many of the old Wilmington buildings and houses.

The preceding information is from an Historical Address by Guy Hawkins during the dedication of the Town Common on Old Home week 1950.



P & H Before the flood

Special thanks to Al Wurzberger for his wonderful assistance in this project. Also special thanks to Carolyn Palmer and Peter Morris for the use of the old photographs of the Wilmington Historical Society.

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