

*Vermont*

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JACQUES CARTIER, seeking a northwestern passage to the East Indies, sailed up the St. Lawrence River in 1535, to the present site of Montreal.

Sixty-eight years passed before another explorer, Samuel Champlain, aged about forty-two years, arrived in the St. Lawrence and, five years afterwards, in 1608, founded Quebec.

At the solicitation of a party of sixty Indians, Champlain and two Frenchmen, in twenty-four canoes, went on an expedition against the Iroquois, and to see the great lake told of by the natives; to which lake Champlain gave his name. They came to battle, supposed to have been near Ticonderoga, and the French used their arquebuses with deadly effect.

The French, in 1665, were the first settlers in Vermont. The King of France, in 1676, authorized grants of land in Canada which also extended into Vermont, and were based on the old feudal system of France; the seignior owing homage to the crown, and the tenants rendering fealty to the seignior. This system continued for 178 years, not being abandoned until 1854. [36]

Some of these grants were made to eminent French officers, without payment to the crown, but if they were not used they were to be relinquished. There were but few real settlements beyond the range of the guns of some French fortress—on the plea that settlers could not be obtained because of fear of Indian raids. [36]

Governor Fletcher, the royal British governor of New York,

in 1696 made to Godfrey Dellius, minister of the Dutch church at Albany, and Commissioner of Indian Affairs, a grant of 840 square miles of land in New York and Vermont, for which Dellius had obtained an Indian grant.

The Earl of Bellomonte, who succeeded Governor Fletcher, regarded such large grants as an impediment to the settlement of the country. He had the grant annulled, and Dellius suspended from the ministry, for "deluding the Mohawk Indians in obtaining the grant." [39]

The general court in Massachusetts, claiming the land in 1716, granted a hundred thousand acres in the southeastern part of Vermont, but no use was made of the land until eight years later, when a settlement was made at Fort Dummer, now Brattleboro. [27]

The Massachusetts court ordered the laying out of some townships in Vermont, six miles square, to be opened to the settlement of sixty families. Each settler was required "to build a house at least eighteen feet square, and fence, plow and stock five acres within three years." [36]

The French, in 1731, made a settlement in Vermont, at Addison on Lake Champlain, opposite the village of Crown Point, which the French had also established. Fort St. Frederic on the west shore of the lake was, in 1742, considered the strongest French fortress in America, with the exception of the one at Quebec. [36]

During the middle eighteenth century many persons began coveting land in the Vermont region, which was claimed by the officials of Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York, the last named asserting that its boundary, by grant of Charles II to the Duke of York, extended east to the Connecticut River.

The grant by Charles II to the Duke, of all the lands between the Connecticut River and the east side of the Delaware, was inconsistent with the charters which previously had been granted to the Massachusetts and Connecticut people, and it would not bear strict examination. But upon this inadequate and blundering transaction of Charles the New York officials founded a claim and hope of obtaining the lands in Vermont. [164]

New Hampshire claimed all territory to a line drawn north

and south twenty miles east of the Hudson River, north of the northern boundary of Massachusetts.

In 1749 Benning Wentworth was the royal governor of New Hampshire. A notorious land grabber, with an unbounded craving for land, he asserted the claim of New Hampshire to the Vermont region by making a grant of land six miles square, on which Bennington is now situated, twenty miles east of the Hudson River, and six miles north of the Massachusetts line.

This grant was divided into sixty-four equal shares or "rights," of 360 acres each, the grantees residing mainly in Portsmouth—the seat of government. None of them is known to have moved to Bennington. The first settlers to get land on which to build were obliged to buy of these speculative shareholders, and then to begin a lifetime of the severest toil and almost incredible hardship, to establish farm homesteads. Wentworth granted fifteen other townships, prior to interference of the French and Indian War.

After their defeat in 1654, the French abandoned their settlements in Vermont and about Lake Champlain, and retreated to Canada. Colonel Philip Skeen, a British officer, held large tracts of land granted to him along the lake. During the war, numerous bodies of troops passed and repassed through the fertile valleys of Vermont. Upon cessation of hostilities the soldiers, to whom the land had been promised as a reward for services in conquering the country from the French, were forgotten in the hasty covetousness of an avaricious governor. [7]

Wentworth, to protect his monopoly by means of strengthening his claim to Vermont, as against the claim of New York officials, began making grants with indefinite boundaries to both speculators and settlers.

In each of these numerous township grants, he reserved five hundred acres for himself. These reservations, and his fee of about \$100 on each grant, brought him a large fortune.

Pioneers from Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire began settling in Vermont without license. There were vast areas of equally good land lying unused in all those colonies, but they were held by speculators at a purchase price which very few pioneers were able to pay. The settlers became so numerous

that they formed towns, and obtained charters from the New York authorities, who coveted the fees for making land grants in Vermont.

Wentworth made not less than 129 township grants of land now in Vermont, mostly after the French War. They included: three tiers or rows of townships laid out along the west side of the Connecticut River for sixty miles; three tiers along a line approximately twenty miles east of the Hudson River, as far north as Poultney; and two tiers from this point north along the east shore of Lake Champlain, to the town of Highgate. [172]

The township grants were divided by the promoters into shares, each share representing 250 acres: one share to each grantee or promoter; two shares, equal to five hundred acres, for Wentworth; one share for the Incorporated Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts; one share for a glebe for the Church of England; one share for the first settled minister, and one share for the benefit of a public school.

Other grants of six miles square, containing 23,040 acres, were issued divided among sixty-four shares, each representing 360 acres. Conveyance of the land to the individual shareholders was by drawing of lots—which assigned the portions to the holders and “to their heirs and assigns for ever.” These proprietary shares were purchasable, much as stock in a corporation is purchasable. They were highly prized and became an object of speculation.

In some grants, a condition was that every grantee, his heirs and assigns, was to cultivate five acres for every fifty acres in his share, within five years, on penalty of forfeiture and regranteeing to others. But this was not enforced. The reason for these exactions was that the presence and activity of people would naturally enhance the value of the land, to the benefit of each other.

At the end of ten years, every landholder was to pay an annual land rent of one shilling per hundred acres. To whom this was payable, or for what purpose, is not clear, but it went, probably, to the public treasury. Before the rent-paying date arrived, the original land speculators had mostly disposed of their holdings, to settlers, or other speculators.

The grant by Wentworth, in 1761, of the town of Windsor, was obtained through the influence of Colonel Josiah Willard, who was a famous land speculator and absentee landholder in at least eighteen townships in New Hampshire and Vermont. There is little to show that the original grantees of Windsor had any desire to put to use the lands granted them. There is, however, much to show that they were mainly interested in holding the land as absentee proprietors, until the increase in population increased the demand for, and value of, the land, so they could sell at a profit. The records show that only nine of the fifty-nine grantees took any active part in the organization, and only three of them settled in Windsor. [172] Speculation dominated the situation.

Title to the land in Windsor was later disputed, which led to a long contest, compromised after eleven years by obtaining a grant from the New York authorities. To obtain this grant, the funds to pay the fee of approximately \$2,300 demanded by the corrupt New York officials, were advanced by two men in New York. One of them received three thousand acres, or one-eighth of all the land in the township, and the other, eleven hundred acres; at an average cost of 56¢ per acre.

To check Wentworth and intimidate the settlers, and to reap the fees for making land grants, Cadwallader Colden, acting Royal Governor of New York, claimed jurisdiction as far east as the Connecticut River.

The Board of Trade and Plantations in England, in 1764, ordered that the eastern boundary of New York should be at the Connecticut River, in accordance with the grant by King Charles II to the Duke of York, ninety years previously. Whereupon, New York declared all the grants made in Vermont by Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire to be illegal. This brought forth a bold proclamation by Wentworth, a royal governor himself, that the aforesaid grant by King Charles to the Duke was obsolete.

The first grant issued by New York officials for land in Vermont was that of 1765, to twenty-six persons for twenty-six thousand acres at Princeton, on which fifty families had settled under a New Hampshire grant.

Most of these New York grantees were "dummies," and within three weeks, all but one had conveyed their holdings to three well-known land speculators. During the same year, Lieutenant-Governor Colden of New York granted ten thousand Vermont acres in one tract, and 151 military patents covering 131,800 acres. These grants took in portions of the grants previously made by Wentworth. Following these grants, Colden, in about one year, granted to various persons 603,000 acres in Vermont. [36]

The speculative craze for land in Vermont had become so intense by this time that, on September 27, 1766, three Americans—Benjamin Price, Daniel Robertson and John Livingston—to obtain what would pass as tokens in the prevailing land gamble, paid to the heirs of M. Pierre Raimbault, 90,000 livres (equivalent to about \$18,000) for the absolutely valueless grant of the seigniority of La Maunadiere made by the King of France ninety years previously. The seigniority fronted twelve miles on Lake Champlain and extended fifteen miles inland: on it, Burlington is now situated. [35]

Some of the Wentworth grantees of Vermont land sent three agents to England to seek of the king protection from the New York officials. As a result, Lord Shelburne of the Board of Trade, in 1767, wrote Governor Moore of New York that the king commanded that no new grants be made by New York officials in the disputed territory, "until you receive further orders." But the governor's term expired and his successor disregarded this order. Making grants at \$2,000 to \$2,500 for each township, was a lucrative business for the New York officials. [27]

The question of the validity of grants caused prolonged litigation in which ejectment proceedings were instituted by New York officials in 1770. Grants, including large areas to speculators, continued to be made by officials of both New York and New Hampshire, of the same land which each had granted to others.

In October, 1769, New Hampshire settlers resisted New York grantees, and two years later, to enforce the claim of New York, the sheriff and the militia were ordered to eject the settlers on the Vermont land granted by Wentworth. This move met with armed resistance, led by Ethan Allen (the first appearance in

Vermont history of this afterwards celebrated hero of the Revolutionary War). New York officials offered £15 reward for his capture. [164]

Nevertheless, Royal Governor Dunmore of New York made numerous grants of land in Vermont, aggregating 511,900 acres during 1771. The following year, two agents were appointed by Wentworth grantees to go again to London to petition the king to confirm the New Hampshire grants. [36]

Governor Tryon of New York, in one year, made grants in Vermont aggregating 542,450 acres, principally to his friends and dependents. These included judges of the courts, members of the colonial assembly, and prominent lawyers—all of them holding the land unused, until an increase in population should create a demand for it at increased prices. This, together with the large fees to the New York officials for deeds, accounts for the persistent claims of New York officials to the Vermont region.

The New York governor wrote the Board of Trade in London that the Board's restrictions against New York making grants in Vermont were "repugnant to the claims of persons who, from their numbers and connections, have a powerful influence" [36], and that, without any right whatever, people are swarming over the land between the Connecticut River and Lake Champlain. [50]

Colden again became royal governor of New York, and in three years granted 379,100 acres in Vermont. Ethan Allen and his cousin, Remember Baker, speculated in land, and in 1773 "acquired forty-five thousand acres fronting on Lake Champlain, and sundry lesser parcels," which they advertised for sale. In 1776 they held 60,829 acres, valued at \$297,408.\*

In 1774 agents of a group of farmers in Scotland arrived in America, for the purpose of buying land for a Scotch settlement. After inspecting land in several colonies, they bought seven thousand acres at Barnet, in Vermont, paying 14*d* (28¢) per acre. [36]

John Witherspoon, a Scotsman, and President of Princeton College in New Jersey, was quite a land speculator. In 1792, he exchanged 12,057 acres in Nova Scotia for 8,045 acres near Rye-

\*Pell, in *Ethan Allen*.

gate, Vermont, where he already had 2,760 acres. It was a period of wild land speculation, in which all classes were engaged. [36]

The ouster proceedings continued until 1775; there were riots, culminating at Westminster in the killing of one man, and wounding of several others. But just then came news of the battle at Lexington, and the beginning of the American Revolution, after which the controversy about land grants was put aside. [164]

In addition to Wentworth's personal holdings of sixty-five thousand acres, he distributed numerous town lots and acreage tracts to members of his family, to friends, to high public officials and to other prominent personages, including a great many citizens of New York, some of whom were already large landholders in the latter province. Colonel Benjamin Bellows held between eight and nine thousand acres of land in Vermont and New Hampshire, including Bellows Falls. Vermont grants made by royal and vice-royal governors of New York, before and during the Revolutionary War, aggregated 2,418,710 acres; [36] totaling 40 per cent of the area of the state.

Robert Livingston of New York, who held thirty-five thousand acres of land in Vermont under a New York grant, was the presiding judge at the trial of suits to eject the Vermont settlers. The judge's brother-in-law, Duane, counsel for the plaintiff to oust the settlers, was largely interested in Vermont land through grants by New York officials, the title to which depended upon the decision in this suit. [36] Ethan Allen was an agent of the defendant settlers. Judgment was rendered against the settlers.

Names of many well-known New York families of today, such as van Cortlandt, De Lancey, Livingston, Schuyler, Stuyvesant, Teneyck, Jay and others, appear in the New York grants of Vermont lands. [36]

The ascendancy of these families in wealth and influence can be attributed to the land privilege, through which, in colonial days, they acquired choice locations of land at little or no cost. Constantly increasing population and development of the country made the tracts more valuable; and their estates were consolidated through intermarriages.

For many years before the American Revolution, the Vermont



region was known only as the "New Hampshire Grants." A convention in June, 1777, adopted the name Vermont.

Thomas Chittenden, first governor of the State of Vermont, was an active land speculator in at least forty-two town proprietaries created by the new state legislature. [172]

The remaining ungranted land was, by authority of the legislature, offered for sale. Companies of speculators formed to buy it were composed of stockholders in all parts of New England, and from as far away as Maryland.

Land speculation interfered with the success of colonization, and delayed actual settlement. [36] But land speculation, while it brought fortunes to a few, had repercussions for many in the usual disappointment, disaster and financial loss during years succeeding the boom collapse. Land was often sold at a fraction of a cent per acre at tax sales, for nonpayment of taxes.