

# HISTORY OF POULTNEY.

## CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY—CHARTER—CHANGES IN THE CHARTER LINES—  
PROPRIETORS' MEETINGS—STREAMS OF WATER, AND SOME-  
THING OF THE TOPOGRAPHY OF THE TOWN.

**A**LITTLE more than a century ago, Poultney was an unbroken wilderness. No foot of white man, unless it may have been some adventurous explorer, had ever trod its solitary pathways. The same venerable summits, "Old Herrick," Spruce Knob and Bird Mountain, stood then as now, and from their tops a grand and beautiful view could have been obtained of the Adirondacks and Lake Champlain at the north-west, the Catskill Mountains at the south-west, and the Green Mountain chain on the east, for nearly a hundred miles in extent. Town Hill and Howe's Hill (the latter formerly known as Parker's Hill) then, as now, looked down upon the Valley of Poultney River, which separates these two prominences. That river, too, was then here, and its tributaries. They were filled with the speckled trout, larger and much more plentiful than now found in those streams; and Poultney River, then without a name, unchecked by dam or crossed by bridge, coursed its roaring or babbling way beneath the tufted foliage of the primeval forest into the quiet waters of Lake Champlain. Bears growled, deer bounded, and wolves howled amid the thickets, which no woodman's axe had invaded. No voice of man had for once awakened the echoes of these hills and glens, save some Indian hunter, as he pursued his game, or uttered the defiant war-whoop as he met his foe in deadly conflict. Then, everything was in its rudest dress—hill side and hollow, forest and rock—all as nature made, all as their untutored occupants left them.

*Stager*  
*Essex Hill, June 1840*  
*Stager, June 1840*

The Indian passed away, and with him perished the story of his race. All their tender loves and their revenges; every adventure of chief or subject—all alike unrecorded, have gone forever into an oblivion from which the pen of the historian can never recover them.

The white man came. In defiance of a frowning forest, the inclemencies of a severe climate, and in the midst of blood-thirsty beasts of prey, he sought his home. He counted and accepted the cost; he set up the altars of his faith, and taught the wilderness to "bud and blossom as the rose." He made of the forest tree his comfortable dwelling; the virgin soil soon answered his call, and loaded his table with luxuries, and filled his barns with plenty. Idle streams were made to work their passage, as they were made to turn his machinery, and thus, with tireless gladness, to aid and assist him in the business of life. The patient genius of religion and education built the church; the school-house took his little ones in care, and trained them up to execute new triumphs in the arts of civilization.

And now for a hundred years, on this ground, that race have plied their intelligence, their invention, their industry and their skill. And why may we not—why should we not gather up the story which those busy years can furnish? Who would refuse to trace the record of their sayings and doings? Who withhold from the hardy pioneers who inaugurated, and the wise and valiant men who have transmitted to us this noble inheritance, that meed of praise their names so richly deserve? much less shall we allow their names to sink into oblivion. Surely not the worthy sons who inherit their names and virtues; surely not the natives of other towns, who have been drawn hither by the prospects of good, and who are now gathering the fruits of a prosperity which others planted. Every just, every filial, every honorable son or citizen of Poultney, must respond to the claim which his native or adopted town has to a permanent and instructive history. It would be undutiful and unjust to the departed generations—the ancient worthies of our town—to refuse it. No efforts should be deemed too costly which can secure it.

On the 9th day of January, 1862, the town clerk's office, kept by Nelson Ransom, then town clerk, in the Union store, in the East Village of Poultney, with nearly all the records and valuable documents which had been accumulating for a century, were burned. A Centennial Celebration was held in Poultney on the 21st day of September, A. D. 1861. Henry Clark, Esq., then of Poultney, now of Rutland, delivered an address on the occasion, and, fortunately, he had, in his preparation, gathered much from the records and documents which otherwise would have been lost. He saved an essential portion of the proprietors' records, and of other documents, by copying, and kindly furnished to the writers of this work what he had thus saved, with much other material that he had collected in preparing his address.

Mr. Clark, in his address, says: "The grants of Charters in this State by Governor Benning Wentworth, commences with Bennington, January 3d, 1754, and extends to August 4th, 1764. Only sixteen charters, and most of those for towns located on the east side of the mountain, were granted until 1761. In that year, sixty charters were granted. In the month of September, eleven were granted, and seven of these were within the present limits of the County of Rutland, viz.: Shrewsbury, September 4; Clarendon, September 5; Rutland, September 7; Timmouth and Wells, September 15; Poultney, September 21; and Castleton, September 22."

Here we have the beginning of the history of the town of Poultney—the Charter, which we find was granted by Benning Wentworth, the "Royal Governor of New Hampshire," Sept., 21, 1761. The following is a copy of the Charter:

1761.

*Province of New Hampshire.*

GEORGE the Third, by the Grace of God, of Great Britain, France and Ireland, King and Defender of the Faith, etc.

*To all Persons to Whom these Presents shall come :*

KNOW YE, That we, of Our special grace, certain knowledge and motion, for the due encouragement of settling a new plantation within Our said Province, by and with the advice of Our

trusty and well beloved Benning Wentworth, Esquire, Our Governour and Commander-in-Chief of Our said Province of New Hampshire, in New England, and of the Council of said Province, have, upon the conditions and reservations hereinafter made, given and granted, and by these presents for Our Heirs and Successors, do give and grant, in equal shares, unto Our loving subjects, inhabitants of Our said Province of New Hampshire, and to their heirs and assigns forever, whose names are entered on this grant, to be divided to and amongst them into seventy equal shares, all that tract of land situate, lying and being within Our Province of New Hampshire, containing by admeasurement 23,040 acres, which tract is to contain six miles square, and no more, of which an allowance is to be made for highways and unimprovable lands, rocks, ponds, mountains and rivers, 1,040 acres free, according to a plan and survey thereof made by said Governour's order, and returned into the Secretary's office, and hereunto annexed, butted and bounded as follows, viz.:

Beginning at the north-west corner of Wells, a township lately granted in this Province, and from thence running due north, six miles; thence turning off at right angles, and running due east, six miles; thence turning at right angles, and running due south, six miles, to the north-east corner of Wells aforesaid; thence due west, by Wells aforesaid, to the north-west corner thereof, being the bounds begun at, and that the same be, and hereby is, incorporated into a township by the name of Poultney. And the inhabitants that do, or shall hereafter inhabit the said township, are hereby declared to be enfranchised with, and entitled to, all and every the privileges and immunities that other towns within our Province, by law, exercise and enjoy. And further, that the said town, as soon as there shall be fifty families resident and settled therein, shall have the liberty of holding two fairs, one of which shall be held on the ———, and the other on the ———, annually; which fairs shall not continue longer than the respective ——— following the said ———. And that as soon as the said town shall consist of fifty families, a market may be opened, and be kept one or more

days in each week, as may be thought most advantageous to the inhabitants. Also, that the first meeting for the choice of town officers, agreeable to the laws of Our said Province, shall be held on the second Tuesday of October next, which said meeting shall be notified by Mr. Samuel Brown, who is hereby appointed the Moderator of said first meeting, which he is to notify and govern agreeable to the laws and customs of Our said Province. And that the annual meeting, forever after, for the choice of such officers for the said town, shall be on the second Tuesday of March annually.

To have and to hold said tract of land as above expressed, together with all privileges and appurtenances to whom, and their respective heirs and assigns forever, upon the following conditions, viz.:

1st. That every grantee, his heirs and assigns, shall plant and cultivate five acres of land within the town in five years, for every fifty acres contained in his or her share, or proportion of land in said township, and to improve and settle the same by additional cultivation, on the penalty, or forfeiture of his grant or share in the said township, of its reverting to Us, Our heirs or successors, to be by us or them regranted to such of Our subjects as shall effectually settle and cultivate the same.

2d. That all white or other pine trees within the said township, fit for masting Our Royal Navy, be carefully preserved for that use, and none to be cut and felled without Our special license for so doing first had and obtained, upon the penalty of the forfeiture of the right of such grantee, his heirs and assigns, to Us, Our heirs and successors, as well as being subject to the penalty of an Act or Acts of Parliament that now are, or shall be enacted.

3d. That before any division be made to and among the grantees, a tract of land, as near the center of the township as the land will admit of, shall be reserved and marked out for town lots, and of which shall be allotted to each grantee of the contents one acre.

4th. Yielding and paying therefor to Us, Our heirs and successors, for the space of ten years, to be computed from the date

hereof, the rent of one ear of Indian corn only, on the 25th day of December, annually, if lawfully demanded; the first payment to be made on the 25th day of December, 1762.

5th. Every proprietor, settler or inhabitant shall yield and pay unto Us, Our heirs and successors, yearly, and every year from and after the expiration of ten years, from the above said 25th day of December, which will be in the year of our Lord 1772, one shilling, proclamation money, for every hundred acres he so owns, settles or possesses, and so in proportion for a greater or less tract of the said land, which money shall be paid by the respective persons above said, their heirs or assigns, in Our Council Chamber in Portsmouth, or to such officer or officers as shall be appointed to receive the same, and this to be in lieu of all other rents and service whatever. •

In testimony whereof, we have caused the seal of Our said Province to be hereunto affixed. Witness, Benning Wentworth, Esquire, Our Governour and Commander-in-Chief of Our said Province, the 21st day of September, in the year of our Lord Christ 1761, and in the first year of Our reign.



By His Excellency's command, with advice of Council.

THEODORE ATKINSON,

*Secretary Province New Hampshire.*

September 21, 1761.

Recorded in the Book of Charters, page 201, 202.

Then follow the names of the grantees on the back of the Charter:—

Samuel Brown,	Woodbury Langdon,	Moses Boynton,
Isaac Lawrence,	Elijah Wilson,	Titus Salter,
Timothy Hopkins,	Abraham Brown,	Elijah Cobb,
Ezra Whittlesey,	Stephen Hallock,	Eli Cowles,
Isaac Brown,	John Chamberlin,	Solomon Whitney,
Coffee Vanshaus,	Samuel Southgate,	Riduff Dutcher,
Samuel Brown, Jr.	David Whitney,	William Buck,
Elijah Brown,	Benjamin Cowles,	Ephraim Hewitt,

Abraham Vandusen,	Gideon Lawrence,	Caleb Colver,
Conrad Vandusen,	John Nelson,	Daniel Wolditch,
John Vandusen,	Isaac Davis,	James Cornwall,
Matthew Vandusen,	John Douaghy,	Elkanah Parris,
Jacob Vandusen,	John Hart,	Richard Southgate,
Isaac Vandusen,	Aaron Whitmore,	Thomas Gage,
Jonathan Nash,	Thomas Sumner,	Tiny Demick,
Reuben Pixley,	William Douaghy,	Stephen Dewey,
Joseph Patterson,	Thomas Ashley,	Abner Dewey,
John Brown,	Nathaniel Fellows,	Stephen Fay,
John Fassil,	Isaac Garfield,	Daniel Warner,
John Langdon,	David Glasier,	Thomas Bradford.
	Theodore Atkinson,	

His Excellency, Benning Wentworth, Esquire, a tract of land, to contain five hundred acres, as marked "B. W." in the plan, which is to be counted two written shares; one whole share for the incorporated society for the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts; one share for the glebe of the Church of England, as by law established; one share for the first settled minister of the Gospel, and one share for the benefit of schools in said town.

Province of New Hampshire, September 21, 1761.

Recorded in Book of Charters, page 203.

THEODORE ATKINSON, *Secretary.*

Recorded by SOLOMON WHITNEY, *Proprietors' Clerk.*

We have no record of any action which preceded the granting of the Charter, but it was understood by the old inhabitants that the grantees were at the time residents of Litchfield County, Connecticut, and Berkshire County, Massachusetts, and it was evidently so, in the main at least. The first Proprietors' Meetings were held in those counties. Those two counties were contiguous—one the north-western county of Connecticut, the other the western county of Massachusetts. The work preliminary to obtaining the Charter was doubtless performed in the locality named; but whether any of the grantees had hitherto visited the locality, since known as Poultney, we know not. We are left, too, in ignorance as to the origin of the name of our town.

There has been a tradition, but perhaps not reliable, that there was at some time, in England, a Lord Poultney, and that a knowledge of this lord suggested the name. Mr. Clark informs us that some years since he visited a family in Baltimore, with the hope of ascertaining the origin of the name of our town, and that, in the interview, members of the family gave it as their impression that Benning Wentworth was a friend of some distinguished personage or family in England by the name of Poultney, and hence came the name. Poultney may be found on the map of England, as the name of a small lake, and it is the name of one other town in the United States. The name is not common, but it is a good one.

The town of Poultney, as will be seen, was chartered by the Governor and Council of a Royal Province, and the first settlers and occupants of our soil were subjects of George III., King of Great Britain. It is evident that at the time of granting the Charter, no survey had been made, except on paper. This, however, they were enabled to do in a manner that the lines could be located to a certainty, as it was a town six miles square, and the east and west lines running "due north," from the north-west and north-east corners of Wells. The lines have since been surveyed, and it is found that they run eight degrees from a due course north or south, east or west. Time has produced this variation, as surveyors will understand. The south-west corner, the starting point of the survey in the Charter, is in the east line of the State of New York, and was the south-west corner of a farm formerly owned by Samuel Hyde, and is some fifty rods west of north of the Williams Slate Mill. The north-west corner is in a swale in the east line of Fairhaven, and is also the south-west corner of Castleton. This corner is not far from the Farnum and other slate quarries. The north-east corner is on the west side of Bird Mountain, near the south end, and is in the west line of Ira, and is also the south-east corner of Castleton. The last two corners named have remained unchanged from the day of the Charter. The south-east corner, as located by the Charter, is about half a mile nearly north of Middletown village, on what has been called



the Loomis farm, recently owned by Royal Coleman, and the north-east corner of Wells, as chartered and originally located, was also there.

On the 13th of October, 1784, the town of Middletown was incorporated by an act of the Legislature, approved at that date, and the territory of which it was composed was taken from the the towns of Poultney, Ira, Tinmouth and Wells. The survey embodied in the act, gives 2,388 acres as taken from the south-east part of the town of Poultney. The piece taken is nearly triangular in form, the base resting upon the original south line of Poultney.

It will be seen that the Charter survey begins "at the north-west corner of Wells," and runs "due north, six miles." In a portion of the distance on this line there has been this change. Preparatory to the admission of Vermont into the Union, in 1790, Commissioners were appointed on the part of the States of Vermont and New York to examine and report a boundary line between the two States. The Commissioners report a line "beginning at the north-west corner of Massachusetts; thence westward along the south boundary of the township of Pownal, to the south-west corner thereof; thence northerly, along the western boundaries of Pownal, Bennington, Shaftsbury, Arlington, Sandgate, Rupert, Pawlet, Wells and Poultney, as those townships are now held and possessed, *to the river, commonly called Poultney River; thence down the same, through the deepest channel thereof, to East Bay.*"

The report was accepted and ratified by the two States, and the boundary line established as reported. The amount of land gained or lost by the town of Poultney in this settlement of the boundary question was but a trifle, as the "due north" line was made thereby to follow the river from a point a little south of west from West Poultney village, to a point a little north of where A. M. Knapp now lives, and where it strikes the east line of Fairhaven, a distance of about two miles.

On the 31st day of October, 1798, five thousand five hundred and forty-two and three-fourth acres and thirty-nine rods were set to Poultney from the north part of Wells, by an act of the

Legislature (the inhabitants of the respective towns having previously assented and agreed thereto in town meetings called for that purpose). This annexation to Poultney carried the south line of the town some two miles farther south, and gave to Poultney over three thousand acres more than it had by the Benning Wentworth charter. The town of Poultney is now bounded north by Castleton, east by Ira and Middletown, south by Middletown and Wells, and west by Granville and Hampton, N. Y., and Fairhaven, Vermont.

The five hundred acres reserved to Benning Wentworth, the Governor, were located in the south-west corner of the town as chartered. The tract was for a long time familiarly known as the Governor's farm. He, doubtless, disposed of it at an early day; but who his grantee or grantees were, neither the town records, as they were destroyed by fire, nor tradition informs us. Samuel Hyde at one time owned a large portion of this tract. It is now owned mainly by Ira M. Clark, N. C. Hyde, N. P. Beach, Friend Martin and William R. and John R. Williams.

The locating of the "one whole share for the incorporated society for the propagation of the Gospel in foreign parts," no information can now be given, except that the share is now in two parts, one in the farm now owned by Hiel Angevine, about three miles north of the west village, the other on the Deacon Hindman farm, so-called, east of the east village, and a mile or so up the Hampshire Hollow road. This farm is now owned by Michael Igo. The occupants of those two farms pay an annual rent to the Episcopal Church.

The share "for the glebe of the Church of England" has been diverted to the use of schools in the town. This share, which would consist of 329 acres, or thereabouts, seems to have been located in parcels at different points; and so of the share "for the benefit of a school in said town." Previous to the year 1868, there had come to be a good deal of confusion in regard to amount of rents, as well as to the localities of the school lands. In pursuance of a vote of the town, that year, Merritt Clark and Joseph Joslin, by an examination of the few

remaining records of the town, old deeds found here and there, and by surveys, succeeded in locating all, or nearly all, the school lands in town, which, as will now be understood, included both the glebe and school lots; also in ascertaining the annual rents or dues arising from each. Mr. Clark kept a record of the same, which is here copied:

The owner of the Kinney farm, so-called, located between the east and west villages, now owned and occupied by Marcus W. Bliss and wife, pays an annual rent of	- - - - -	\$29 00
The Joslin farm, located some two miles north of West Poultney, now owned and occupied by Michael Caraway, an annual rent of	- - -	58 50
The Town Farm, an annual rent of	- - - -	5 19
Alanson Adams, on land located a mile, or thereabouts, east of East Village, annually,	- -	7 00
Julius Spalding, Guernsey and Jones lot, east of East Village, annually,	- - - - -	7 00
Archibald Dewey lot, annually,	- - - -	7 00
S. J. Dewey lot, annually,-	- - - -	7 00
Horace M. Ruggles, an annual rent of	- - -	68
A timber lot, lately owned by Walter Ward, now owned by D. Ballard and others, a rent of	-	5 00
A timber lot, owned by Edwin S. Dewey, rent	-	5 00
There is also an annual rent derived from the Ashley farm, located near East Poultney, which arises from the original town plot; it is	- - -	1 80
The town of Wells pays annually to the town of Poultney	- - - - -	18 26

How these lands came to be so scattered, we are now unable to explain, or give satisfactory account thereof; but they are located as above given, and the annual rents paid in sums as given, and all parties acquiesce therein.

There seems, from all the information we can get, to have been some doubts in regard to the "share for the first settled minister." Ithamar Hibbard was the first settled minister, and

the share was located a little north of the east village, and Mr. Hibbard built a barn upon it on the west side of the highway, which, at the present writing, is still standing. A question arose in regard to the formality of his ordination, and it was supposed for a time that his right to the land so appropriated would be disputed. It is not now known whether he was ever disturbed in his claim to the first settled minister's right; he actually took possession of it, for a time occupied it, and finally sold and conveyed it.

Mr. Clark informs us, in his address, that "the earliest recorded meeting of the proprietors was held in Sheffield, Mass., October 7, 1763," and at that meeting, "Samuel Brown, agreeably to the provisions of the Charter, was elected Moderator, and Solomon Whitney, Proprietors' Clerk;" and that "there was a full organization, by the choice of officers," and the transaction of other "business proper to be done in the way of organization." Meetings were held, from time to time, in Massachusetts and Connecticut, as occasion required, until a meeting was held in Canaan, Conn., February 28, 1772, when Ethan Allen was chosen Proprietors' Clerk, Elisha Baker, Justice of the Peace, and Thomas Ashley, Treasurer. At that meeting, it was "voted that future meetings be held at the house of Heber Allen, in Poultney;" and, accordingly, it adjourned to meet there on the first Tuesday in April, 1772. The proprietors' meetings, after the adjournment at Canaan, were held in Poultney, the action of which we shall hereafter notice. Ethan Allen and his brothers had by this time come to be largely interested in Poultney lands, as will hereafter appear.

The principal stream of water in this town is Poultney River. It rises in the town of Tinmouth, runs a westerly course, through Middletown—receives several small streams from the north and south—enters Poultney near the south-east corner of the town; thence, runs north-westerly about two miles, to the north line of the Adams farm; thence westerly, about four miles through the central part of the town, until it strikes the western boundary of the State, about half a mile south of west from

the west village. It there turns northwardly, and makes the State line as it winds and turns, until it enters Lake Champlain near Whitehall, N. Y.

Its principal tributaries in Poultney enter it upon the north side. The first rises in the mountain, near Spruce Knob, runs a south-westerly course through "Morse Hollow," and enters the river on the Stephen Morse farm, so-called. This was formerly known as the "Tilden Brook."

The second rises in "Clark Hollow," receives a small stream from "Hampshire Hollow," near where Joseph Clark now lives, and enters the river on Alanson Adams' farm, opposite the red school house. The third rises in the town of Ira, north of Spruce Knob, runs a westerly course across the farm now owned by Andrew Perry, at the upper part of "Hampshire Hollow," and from thence south-westerly, through "Finnel Hollow," and enters the river at the Todd place, now owned by William H. Hall. The fourth is called the "Whitney Brook;" it rises on Town Hill, near Noah Fenton's, and runs a south-westerly course; crosses the Castleton road about a mile north of the east village, runs near Merritt Clark's house, passes under the Poultney House, and then into the river near the railroad bridge, south of the west village. The fifth is called the "Howe Brook." It rises on the David Ransom farm, runs a southerly, then a westerly course, and enters the river near A. M. Knapp's. The last, and most considerable, tributary is the "Lewis Brook." It rises on Pond Hill, in the north-east part of the town, has a south-westerly course, crossing the Castleton road near Mark Lewis' house, the railroad and the old turnpike near Philo Hosfords, and the Fairhaven road near L. C. Spalding's, and enters the river on the Dodge farm, now owned by R. Jones, in the town of Fairhaven. Poultney river is a rapid stream, at least, it so appears in high water. It rises suddenly, after a thaw or heavy rain, and sometimes it has occasioned much damage, accounts of which, to some extent, will be given hereafter. In an early day, before the lands were so generally cleared and the low lands drained, the river furnished a reliable water-power. The stream is not as large as formerly, yet might now be made available as

a water power, perhaps, the entire year, by the construction of stone dams and reservoirs.

The geological formation of the town of Poultney is, as we understand, mainly slate. This is clearly so in the western portion of the town—the eastern parts being, to some extent, limestone and some other substances. The soils may be given as a fair average with other Vermont towns in productiveness. In the central portion of the town, or that portion where the two villages are located, and between them, the soil is filled with small stones and gravel, brought on, without doubt, by the Poultney River at some time prior to the settlement of the town. The western portion of the town is comparatively level; the eastern portions more hilly and mountainous. Before the town was settled, like other portions of Vermont, it was covered with a forest. Large pine trees, and many of them, were found in the lower lands of the western part of the town, with some hemlock, and, on the higher lands, beech and maple predominated. On the grounds now belonging to the Troy Conference Academy are still standing a goodly number of maples, which were left standing of the original forest. In and about the locality where the west village now is, there were many elm trees—a few of them are still standing, though we cannot say that all of them were started in their growth prior to the settlement. A large elm tree was left standing about where the south end of the depot building in Poultney now is, which was cut down by Ephraim Herrick about the year 1800, when he built his house in that locality. The tree was cut near the ground, and the house built over the stump. In 1856, or near that time, the house (it had then become the depot building) was repaired. In taking up the floor of the south-east corner room, the stump of the old elm was discovered, measured, and found to be nine feet and four inches in diameter. The stump was then in a condition of what is called “dry rot,” but was apparently as perfect in size and form as ever. The timber where the east village now is was mainly hemlock, and east of there, beech and maple, interspersed now and then with hemlock and pine.