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Studying Early Town Settlement in the Connecticut River Valley

This issue of the Flow of History newsletter focuses on the processes of settlement and town formation in the Upper Connecticut River Valley of New Hampshire and Vermont. The material provided here is a subset of the resources being made available in a more extensive Early Settlement Toolkit developed by the Flow (http://www.flowofhistory.org/es_toolkit/index.html). As you see from the unit frame on page 4, the toolkit is organized around four Focusing Questions:

1. Who first lived in this area we now call Vermont/New Hampshire?

2. Where did the first European settlers come from and why did they come to this area?

3. Who settled here and how did they live?

4. What did the settlers do to organize their towns?

The previous Flow newsletter about Abenaki history and culture addressed the first question; this issue provides a glimpse into the resources and activities that engage questions 2 and 3, beginning with brief background essays.

Because studying the early settlement of towns in New Hampshire and Vermont is a place-based endeavor, it offers a great opportunity to engage students (and others in your community) in creating a Quest about early town history. You can see a model Colonial Quest, complete with directions and curricular ideas—all easily adaptable to your own students and community—at www.vitalcommunities.org/valleyquest/colonialquest/index.htm.

Thanks to Steve Glazer of Poetics of Place, classroom teachers Marguerite Ames and Bridget Fariel, and Beth Hughes of Broadwing Design for assistance in designing this toolkit.

Focusing Question 2—Why did settlers come to New Hampshire and Vermont, and where did they come from?

Vermont and New Hampshire were colonized by settlers who migrated from other colonies in New England. The first Europeans in New Hampshire came from England beginning in 1623 and settled in the seacoast region around Portsmouth. They gradually spread out from that area through the 17th and 18th centuries, but didn't reach the Connecticut River Valley until about 1740.

![Engraving of Fort Dummer]
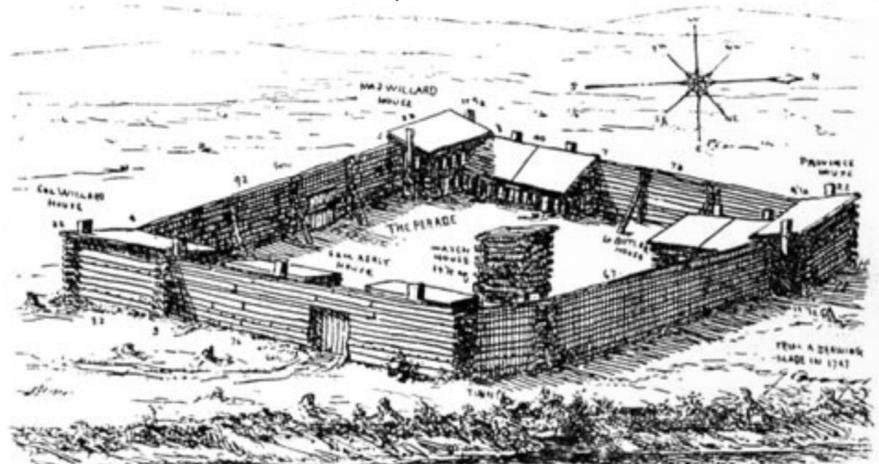
Fort Dummer, in what is now Brattleboro, Vermont.

It may sound odd to refer to Euro-American settlement of Vermont and New Hampshire as "colonization," but that is an accurate description of the process. A colony, after all, is "a body of people living in a new territory but retaining ties with the parent state." Migrants to New England maintained close ties with Old England, and migrants to the Connecticut River Valley in New Hampshire and what would eventually become Vermont kept close ties with their relatives, friends, and neighbors in the places they came from. Place names provide one clue to these links, and it is easy to trace the movement of place names from England, to Connecticut and Massachusetts, to New Hampshire and Vermont. This was also a process of colonization because Euro-American settlers were advancing into territories that were inhabited by Native Americans, with the intention of possessing those lands on their own terms, resulting in the disempowerment and displacement of the indigenous people.

America promised enormous natural resources, unimpeded economic and social mobility, and freedom from persecution.

People migrated from England to America, and from southern New England to New Hampshire and Vermont, for the same reasons. In both cases, they were seeking greater opportunities and freedoms for themselves and their families. England's population was growing, the countryside was becoming deforested, and there was little economic, social, or religious mobility. America promised enormous natural resources, unimpeded economic and social mobility, and freedom from persecution. But as the population of southern New England began to grow and social and religious institutions became well established, the same kinds of pressures on land, resources, religious tolerance, and mobility developed there. Americans were continually seeking fresh opportunities beyond the boundaries of the places where they were born and raised.

These forces led people, primarily from Connecticut and Massachusetts, to migrate to the Connecticut River Valley in the middle of the 18th century. As historian Jere Daniell notes, "Between 1710 and 1760 the combined population of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut leaped from about 100,000 to over 400,000. Land, good farming land especially, became increasingly scarce and expensive. Young adults eager to establish their own homesteads found it difficult to buy sufficient acreage for a good farm in their native provinces and began looking elsewhere. New Hampshire had much to offer. It contained a seemingly limitless supply of good timber and an adequate amount of fertile soil, the provincial government both encouraged settlement and promoted the formation of town governments with which they were familiar, and land could be leased or purchased at a reasonable price" (Daniell, *Colonial New Hampshire* [1980], pp. 141-42).
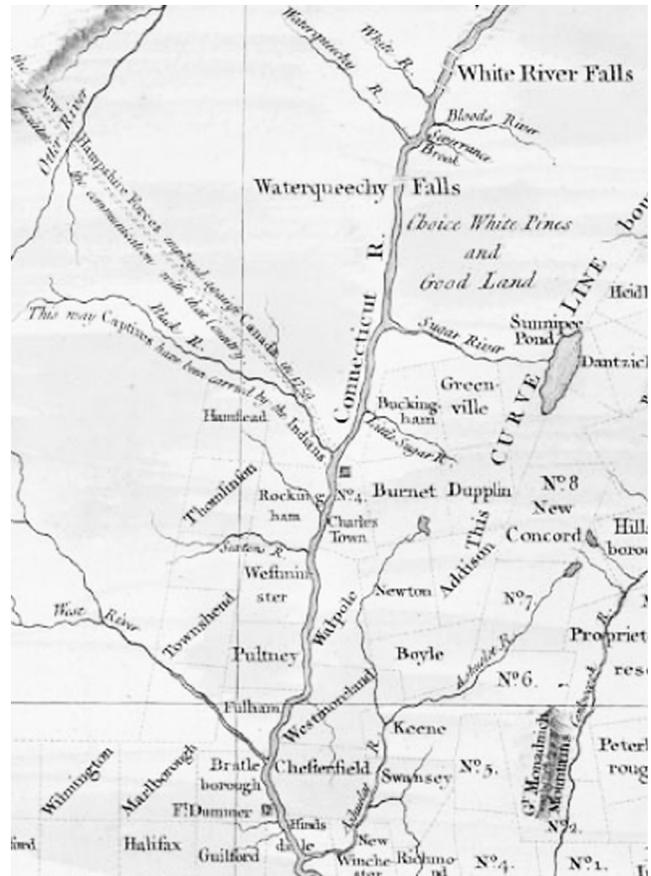

A detail from the Langdon map of 1761.

However, because the native Abenakis resisted the colonization of their lands, it only became safe for settlers to migrate up the Connecticut River Valley beyond the Brattleboro area after the British victory in the French and Indian (Seven Years) War in 1760. Fort Dummer (1724) and Fort Number 4 in Charlestown (1744) provided some protection and served as trading posts where Europeans and Native Americans exchanged goods and interacted cooperatively. But the Abenaki effectively kept the Euro-Americans out until their French allies were defeated. New Hampshire Governor Benning Wentworth issued a charter for the town of Bennington in 1749—the first in the New Hampshire Grants that would eventually become Vermont—but expansion up the Connecticut River didn't begin until the end of the imperial wars. Between 1760 and 1764, Wentworth chartered more than 60 towns in the region and many others farther to the west. By 1765, towns had been laid out in nearly the entire valley. Small numbers of settlers began to arrive rapidly, and the trickle soon swelled into a torrent. The first federal census of 1790-91 counted 36,000 people living along the length of the river in Vermont and New Hampshire, with 13 towns having a population of more than 1,000. Daniell thinks it likely that the actual population was probably larger (Daniell, "English Settlement in the Connecticut River Valley, 1691-1791," www.flowofhistory.org/es_toolkit/essays/english.html).

Focusing Question 3—Who settled in the Connecticut River Valley and how did they live?

Euro-American settlement and town formation in the Connecticut River Valley and throughout what would become Vermont was a relatively orderly process. The people who migrated here, primarily from southern New England, came from established communities that felt to many like they were bursting at the seams. By the middle of the 18th century population growth made it increasingly difficult and expensive for families to provide adequate land to enable their children and grandchildren to support themselves in their home communities. People in Connecticut, Massachusetts, and eastern New Hampshire desired to purchase "uninhabited" lands on the frontier beyond already settled towns, to provide for the continuing prosperity of their families.

The first step in the process was to petition the crown, through the governor of the colony, for the right to establish a new town. Groups of people called proprietors (nearly all men) formed to make such a request, they paid a fee, the area was surveyed and boundaries laid out, and then the governor issued a charter to the proprietors, each of whom was granted an equal share in the town. Once a charter was granted, the proprietors met—usually in their home communities—to begin creating the town. The first orders of business included electing officers to govern these earliest stages of town formation, laying out the lots of land to be distributed among the proprietors, and deciding how to pay for the allotment. The records of proprietors' meetings also show that they provided incentives for people to settle in their new towns. For example, they might offer a right to build a mill to the first five families, or promise to give a cow to the first five women in town.
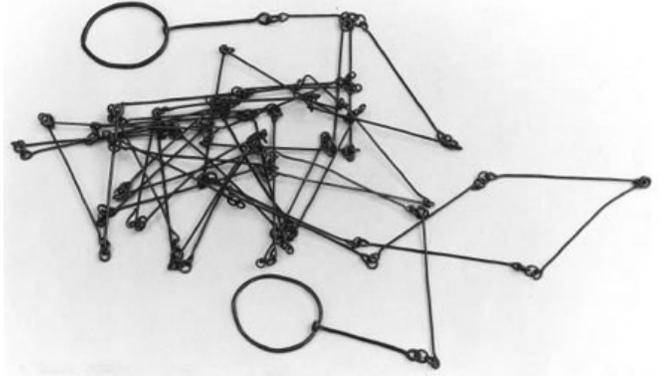
A surveyor's chain.

Most proprietors viewed town formation as a speculative business venture. Most of them never intended to settle in the new towns themselves, and most of them never did. Instead, they wanted to create a brisk market for lots in the towns and sell them to land-hungry families who were looking to settle in these frontier communities. Comparing the names on the charter of a Connecticut River Valley town with the names of the early settlers found in the town history usually shows little overlap.

The early settlers in this region were a hardy bunch who did in fact carve homesteads and communities out of a mostly forested wilderness. The story of the Mann family, the first settlers in Orford, N.H., is typical (see page 7). Most families cleared and farmed the land and provided for much of their own subsistence. Some undoubtedly took advantage of sites previously used by Abenakis, and many adopted Abenaki agricultural practices like making maple sugar and planting squash and beans with corn. But commercial enterprises like mills and a general store were also present from the very beginning in most towns. And before long, people were setting up businesses to exploit abundant natural resources like timber and minerals. There is truth to the image of communities made up of self-sufficient family farms, however, it is important to recognize that specialization, barter, and trade with other regions are also part of the picture. A store in Plainfield, N.H., for example, was selling chocolate, ginger, mohair, and shoe buckles as early as 1768; another store in Norwich, Vt., advertised similar goods including coffee, French brandy, molasses, knives and forks, screws, and iron tools in the 1790s. These new frontier communities were thoroughly embedded in larger commercial networks.

The largest white pines, known as mast trees, were reserved for the English royal navy.

Frame: Early Settlement of the Upper Valley (1750 to 1800)

Here is a suggested framework for a unit of study about the early settlement of the Upper Connecticut River Valley. We have developed a set of Enduring Understandings, Essential Questions, and Focusing Questions that can help teachers think about how to approach the topic and what general content and themes to emphasize. We've also identified the relevant Vermont and New Hampshire social studies standards, by grade level. Suggested resources and lessons are listed at the end.

Topic/Title	Early Settlement of the Upper Valley (1750 to 1800)
Overview	The purpose of this unit is to study the early settlement of the Upper Connecticut River Valley using primary sources and the landscape. Students follow an inquiry model where they gain background knowledge to the topic, generate questions about the people who settled this region, and then launch an historical investigation culminating in a historical cemetery quest that they can share with their community.
Enduring Understandings	■ The Abenaki first lived and named the area we now call Vermont and New Hampshire. ■ The Connecticut River Valley of Vermont and New Hampshire was primarily settled by colonists from Connecticut and Massachusetts.. ■ Town meeting was the main political institution in VT and NH communities.
Essential Questions	■ What is the relationship between culture, humans, and geography?
Focusing Questions	■ Who first lived in this area we now call Vermont/New Hampshire? ■ Where did the first European settlers come from? Why did they come to this area? ■ Who settled here and how did they live? ■ What did the settlers do to organize their towns?
Content Grade Expectations for Vermont	**H&SS3-4:8** Students connect the past with the present by… ■ Explaining differences between historic and present-day objects in Vermont, and identifying how the use of the object and the object itself changed over time. ■ Describing ways that life in the community and Vermont has both changed and stayed the same over time ■ Examining how events, people, problems, and ideas have shaped the community and Vermont. **H&SS3-4:9** Students show understanding of how humans interpret history by… ■ Identifying and using various sources for reconstructing the past, such as documents, letters, diaries, maps, textbooks, photos, and others. **H&SS3-4:12** Students show understanding of human interaction with the environment over time by… ■ Describing how people have changed the environment in Vermont for specific purposes. ■ Recognizing patterns of voluntary and involuntary migration in Vermont. **H&SS3-4:11** Students interpret geography and solve geographic problems by… ■ Observing, comparing, and analyzing patters of local and state land use to understand why particular locations are used for certain human activities.
Inquiry Grade Expectations for Vermont	**Students initiate an inquiry by…** ■ Asking relevant and focusing questions based on what they have seen, what they have read, what they have listened to, and/or what they have researched.

New Hampshire Curriculum Framework: Social Studies	**SS:CV:6:2.2:** Identify and illustrate the heritage that early settlers brought to the development and establishment of American democracy, e.g., political, legal, philosophical, or religious traditions. (Themes: E: Cultural Development, Interaction, and Change)
	SS:GE:6:4.4: Analyze the spatial patterns of settlement, e.g., urbanization along rivers, agriculture on fertile plains, or nomadic lifestyles in steppes and deserts. (Themes: C: People, Places and Environment, E: Cultural Development, Interaction, and Change)
Background Information	**Freedom and Unity: The New Frontier** http://www.freedomandunity.org/new_frontier/frontier_intro.html#	**New Hampshire History Slideshows** http://www.nhhistory.org/edu/support/slidesindex.htm
Suggested Resources	**Children's Books:** ■ Marge Bruchac, *Malian's Song* ■ Natalie Kinsey-Warnock, *Bear that Heard Crying* ■ Alice Dalgliesh, *Courage of Sarah Noble* ■ Diana Appelbaum, *Giants in the Land* ■ Joseph Bruchac, *Winter People*	**Background Reading:** ■ Jan Albers, *Hands on the Land* ■ Rebecca Brown, ed., *Where the Great River Rises* ■ Frank Bryan, *Real Democracy: The New England Town Meeting* ■ David Foster, *New England Forests through Time*
Suggested Lessons	■ Lessons are online at http://www.flowofhistory.org/es_toolkit/index.html	

Exploring Early Town Settlement through Primary Sources: Mann and Whitelaw

The narrative of John Mann (see page 7) describes the journey of a young couple from Hebron, Connecticut, to Orford, N.H., in 1765, and some of their early experiences as settlers in this new town. We have paired this narrative with images from the 1810 Whitelaw map of Vermont in a primary source activity that examines early town settlement. (Find this map at the Harvard map collection: http://tinyurl.com/679o8s8. For New Hampshire towns, use the 1784 Holland map, which you can find at the Library of Congress: http://tinyurl.com/3hts9t7).


A detail from the Whitelaw map.

After reading the Mann narrative out loud, a class could work together or in small groups to answer a set of questions. Then students would look at the map image of their town from the Whitelaw (or Holland) map, along with the map key, and answer another series of questions about what they see. As a final step to synthesize the knowledge they've gained from each source, have students discuss their new understandings about the early history of their town derived from the story and the map.

A more extensive set of activities using the Mann narrative, and a version of the story written at a middle school level, can be found in the Flow of History's Early Settlement Toolkit: http://www.flowofhistory.org/es_toolkit/index.html.
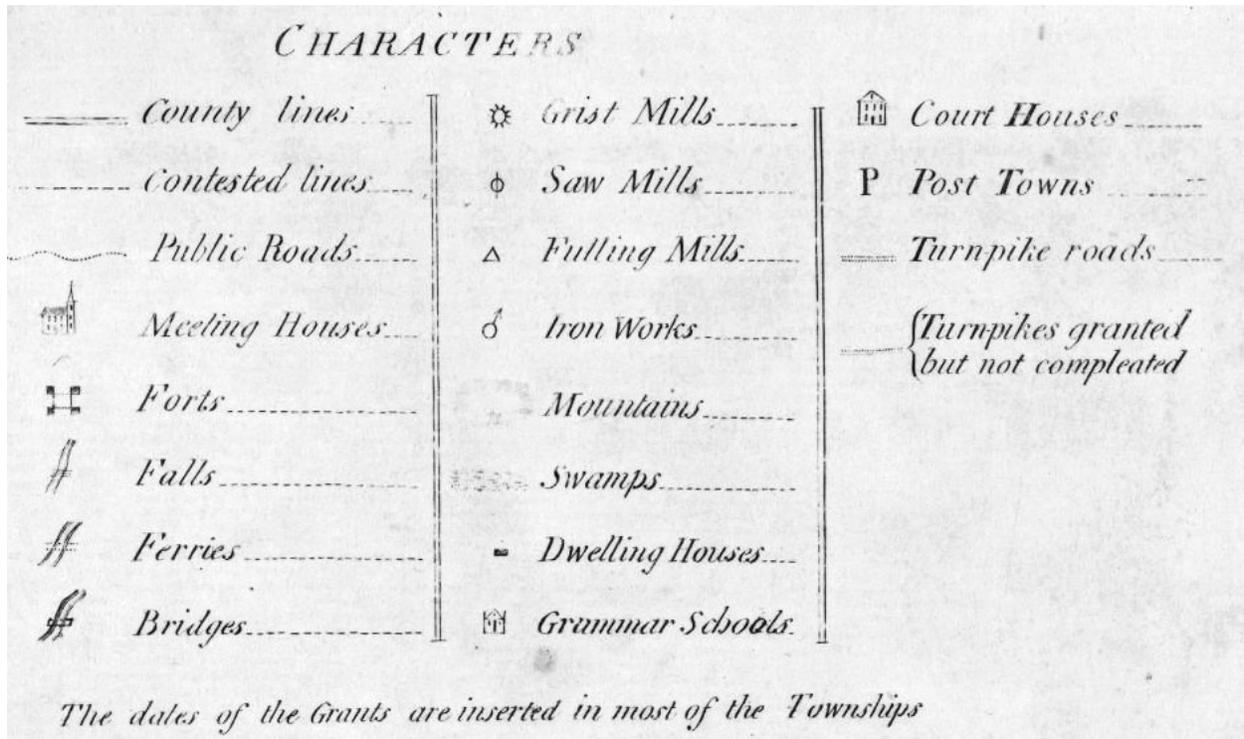
The key for the Whitelaw map of Vermont (1810, first issued in 1796).

Questions about the Mann narrative

- As a class, use Google Maps to diagram the Mann family from first migration until John Mann's settlement in what is now Orford.

- Discussion: How does the Mann family story match what you have already learned about colonization?

- On average, how many miles per day did the Manns travel during the first part of their journey, from Hebron to Charlestown? What information do you have, and how can you use it to figure out the problem?

- Compare this to the rate for the Charlestown to Orford portion of the trip. What factors may have contributed to the difference in rates of travel?

- What does this story tell you about the life of a pioneer family in the Connecticut River Valley? What were some of their needs and now did they meet those needs? (think about food, clothing, shelter).

Questions about the Whitelaw (or Holland) map

What did they first build? **Using a historic map**

Find your town on the map. If your town hadn't been settled yet, pick the closest settled town. How far away is that?

Check off any of the following that appear on the map:

- ☐ Meeting Houses
- ☐ Forts
- ☐ Falls
- ☐ Ferries
- ☐ Bridges
- ☐ Grist Mills
- ☐ Saw Mills
- ☐ Fulling Mills
- ☐ Iron Works
- ☐ Mountains
- ☐ Swamps
- ☐ Dwelling Houses
- ☐ Grammar Schools

- Where are the churches and other large public buildings located?

- Where are the mills located?

- Where do the roads go?

- What can you see on this map that would help settlers (like the Mann family) in your town make their clothes?

- What can you see on this map that would help settlers in your town build their homes?

- What can you see on this map that would help settlers in your town bake their bread?

- What conclusions might you draw if you were to use only this map to find out about life in your town just after the first settlers arrived?

Centennial Celebration of the Town of Orford, N.H. delivered on Thursday, September 7, 1865 with some additional matters relating to the history of the place.

By Joel Mann, (*Adapted by Marguerite Ames for the 4th grade*)

I. My great-great grandfather Richard Mann, a planter, came on the Mayflower with the Pilgrims in 1620. His descendants settled in the Massachusetts counties of Plymouth and Norfolk. His son Richard (my great-grandfather) purchased a farm in Hebron, CT, and moved there. My parents were brought up in Hebron. They married on the Sabbath day, Feb 17, 1765. My grandfather, John Mann, learned that there was land for sale in what would become Orford. He purchased a lot of fifty acres for one dollar an acre. He gave this piece of land to my father, John.

Over the years, skill and hard work has transformed a gloomy wilderness into a productive town.

II John Mann (my father) started on the 16th of October 1765, on horseback with my mother, who carried with her a wardrobe by no means ample for a bride. My father rode part of the way, carrying a knapsack, some tools for coopering, and an axe. On the day they left for the wilds of Coos the people of the village bid them farewell, not expecting ever to see them again. Indeed it was a greater and far more dangerous trip than now to go to California or Oregon.

III At Charlestown, NH, (Fort #4) Mann bought a bushel of oats for his horse, and some bread and cheese for himself and his wife. They set off, he on foot and his wife on horseback. From Charlestown to Orford, a distance of 60 miles, there was no road, only a foot path with marked trees to guide them. The path was often blocked with fallen trees. When they came to one that the horse could not get around, the young bride had to get off the horse. Then they had to unload the horse and make it jump over the obstacle. This happened many times. Once, the horse did not wait to be unloaded and leaped over a large tree, rider and all! His wife and all the luggage ended up in a heap upon the ground! Thankfully she was not hurt, so they packed up and continued on their way.

IV On their journey they stopped in Claremont, Cornish, Plain-field, Lebanon, Hanover, and Lyme to rest or to spend the night. As newcomers, my parents were welcomed and treated to what little food the settlers had. Just before arriving in Orford, they came to a stream that was too deep for wading and had to go upstream to find a safe place for crossing. The banks were steep with tangled underbrush, so this was quite dangerous.

V The whole journey of about two hundred miles took eight days, averaging twenty-five miles in a day. They arrived in Orford on October 24, 1765. Orford was founded by John Mann, a man of pure and noble aims and of greatly useful life. Over the years, skill and hard work has transformed a gloomy wilderness into a productive town. The home of the savage has become the home of an intelligent cultivated Christian people.

VI My oldest brother, Major Mann, wrote an account of the early settlement. He said that when our parents arrived in Orford, Mr. Daniel Cross and his wife were living in a small log hut near the bank of the river. The hut was covered with bark and had a floor of split logs. There was no chimney or hearth. Mr. Cross welcomed the new comers into his cabin. The men agreed to share the cutting of wood and to keeeping a fire in the middle of the cabin. They divided the space using blankets.

VII When my father needed an augur to make a bed, he had to walk nine miles through the woods to Thetford to borrow one. When the bed and two or three chair frames were put together, it was back nine miles through the woods to return the augur. This labor and fatigue was considered as nothing!

VIII Since there was no grain raised yet, Mr. Mann spent his evenings making pails and tubs. When the river was frozen, he piled them on a hand sled and took them to Newbury VT, about 20 miles away. There he exchanged them for corn with the three families living there: Johnston, Bailey, and Hazen. They had been there three years, had cleared land, and raised corn. Back in Orford, they pounded the corn in large mortars made from wood logs that they had hollowed out at one end. Mrs. Mann and Mrs. Cross used the finest ground part of the corn to make cakes. They boiled the coarser part and ate it with milk from Mr. Cross's cow. After they were settled in their own tent, Mrs. Mann went to the river and brought all the water they used in a three-pint basin, except on washing days. What would our young lasses think of beginning housekeeping in that way?

IX My father told me that soon after they arrived, nearly two feet of snow fell and in a few days there fell two feet more. My parents began to think they might be buried alive before the spring. Fortunately plenty of wood was close at hand. My father had built their log cabin on high ground near the river. But, because of the spring thaw, the river rose so much that one morning they found their cabin entirely surrounded by water. He carried his wife to a place where it had not reached. The work of clearing the land may be imagined from the fact that the pine trees were an average two hundred feet high! I remember seeing their enormous stumps when I was a boy. When my parents first arrived here, there had been endless forest, the prowling wolf and the timid deer.

Timeline of English Settlement in the Connecticut River Valley

1694	Massachusetts creates the "Frontier Towns," including Deerfield.
1704	Raid on Deerfield. Many settlers are killed or taken captive.
1715	Massachusetts orders the first land survey in present-day southeastern Vermont.
1724	Fort Dummer built.
1736	Massachusetts decides to lay out four townships. Those on the east side of the river (NH) were numbered in order going upstream: No. 1, Chesterfield; No. 2, Westmoreland; No. 3, Walpole; No. 4, Charlestown.
1740	The king settles boundary disputes between Massachusetts and New Hampshire and places the border where it is today.
1744	Fort No. 4 built in Charlestown, New Hampshire.
1749-1761	More than 60 towns in New Hampshire and Vermont are chartered by Governor Benning Wentworth. They are known as the New Hampshire Grants. Some were on land claimed by New York.
1754	Moor's Indian Charity School founded. Later it becomes Dartmouth College.
1756	The Seven Years' War begins as Great Britain declares war on France. The North American conflict expands to Europe, Africa, Asia and South America.
1760	The British capture Montreal, ending the conflict in North America.
1763	The Treaty of Paris ends the war between Britain and France.
c. 1770	Rapid migration of settlers to the northern Connecticut River Valley begins and lasts until the early 1800s.