

The Landing at Parker River (Newbury)

"In February, 1633-34 the Council for New England, assembled at Whitehall, England, adopted an order placing certain restrictions on the transportation of passengers and merchandise to the colony of Massachusetts Bay; and before the ship "Mary and John" and eight other vessels, then lying in the river Thames, were allowed to sail, instructions were issued expressly providing that the captains in command of these vessels

"shall cause the Prayers contained in the Book of Common Prayers, established in the Church of England, to be said daily at the usual hours of Morning and Evening Prayers, and that they cause all persons on board said ships to be present at the same."

In the ship "Mary and John" came Thomas Parker, James Noyes, John Spencer, Henry Short, Henry Lunt, John Bartlett, and many others, who ultimately settled in Newbury. Upon their arrival in New England most of these passengers went to Agawam, now Ipswich, Mass., where they remained until the spring of 1635.

Meanwhile Sir Richard Saltonstall, Henry Sewall, Richard and Stephen Dummer, with others from Wiltshire, England had organized a company for the purpose of stock-raising at a time when the prices for cattle, horses, and sheep were at their highest. They added to their own domestic herds some imported Flemish stock, and persuaded John Spencer, Henry Short, Richard Kent, Thomas Parker, and others to join them in the enterprise, and establish a settlement on the river Quascacunquen, now Parker River.

Sept. 3, 1633, the General Court granted "*John Winthrop, junior, and his assignes*" permission to set up a trading house on the Merrimack River; and under date of May 6, 1635, the House of Deputies passed the following order:-

Quascacunquen is allowed by the court to be a plantation, and it is referred to Mr. (John) Humphrey, Mr. (John) Endicott, Captain (Nathaniel) Turner, and Captain (William) Trask, or any three of them, to set out the bounds of Ipswich and Quascacunquen, or so much thereof as they can; and the name of said plantation shall be changed, and shall hereafter be called Newberry.

Further, it is ordered that it shall be in the power of the court to take order that the said plantation shall receive a sufficient company to make a competent town.

Previous to this date, undoubtedly, a few venturesome fishermen had built temporary residences on the banks of the Merrimack and Quascacunquen rivers; but they were looked upon as trespassers and intruders, for the General Court had forbidden all persons from settling within their jurisdiction without leave.

Rev. Thomas Parker and those associated with him, having obtained permission to begin a plantation "*to be called Newberry*", made preparations to remove from Ipswich early in the spring. There were no roads through the trackless forest, and the transportation of women and children and household goods overland was impracticable. Tradition asserts that they came by

the way of Plum Island Sound, in open boats, and landed, in the month of May or June, 1635, on the north shore of what is now the river Parker, in a little cove about one hundred rods below the bridge; Nicholas Noyes, the brother of Rev. James Noyes, being the first to leap ashore.

Near this secluded spot a number of summer cottages have recently been erected, giving to the place a pleasant, home-like look; but two centuries and a half ago the prospect was less agreeable and inviting.

*"...Eastward, cold, wide marshes stretched away,
Dull, dreary flats without a bush or tree,
O'ercrossed by winding creeks, where twice a day
Gurgled the waters of the moon-struck sea;
And faint with distance came the stifled roar,
The melancholy lapse of waves on the low shore."*

Inland hills rising above hills stood like sentinels over the almost unbroken wilderness. Centuries before this memorable landing Indians had hunted in these forests and fished in the placid stream that ebbs and flows to the falls of Newbury; but only a few of that race remained to resist the encroachments of the white-faced strangers. Dismal and gloomy must have been the outlook as these brave pioneers gathered together at the close of the first day, and contemplated the prospect before them. They knew that wild beasts were roaming through the forests, and whether the red men would welcome them as friends or foes was as yet uncertain.

"Their descendants can have but a faint idea of the difficulties they encountered, and of the dangers that continually hung over their heads, threatening every moment to overwhelm them like a torrent, and sweep them, with those who they dearly loved, to the silent tomb."

Undismayed by these difficulties and dangers, the new settlers instinctively turned their attention to the cultivation of the soil and the development of the resources of nature. Here and there along the winding river they appropriated the few clear spots where the natives had formerly planted corn, and promptly took possession of the neighboring marshes where the growing crop of salt grass promised an abundant harvest. There was no lack of work; no room for idle dreamers. Houses had to be built, land ploughed and tilled, and sheds erected for the protection of cattle before winter set in. House lots, planting lots, and meadow lots were laid out and granted to individual members of the community, and the original entries, giving names and dates, can still be seen on the old records of the town; but how many houses were erected or how many families settled in Newbury during the first year of its existence it is impossible to state with exactness.

Governor Winthrop, in his History of New England, under date of June 3, 1635, records the arrival of two ships with Dutch cattle; and the same day the ship "James" arrived from Southampton, bringing, among other passengers, John Pike, father of the famous Robert Pike, of Salisbury, and one Thomas Coleman, who had been employed by the projectors of the stock-raising company to provide food for the cattle and take care of them for a specified term of years.

In the Massachusetts Colony Records, under date of July 8, 1635:-

It is ordered that there shall be a convenient quantity of land set out by Mr. Dumer and Mr. Bartholemewe, within the bounds of Newbury, for the keeping of the sheepe and cattell that came over in the Dutch shipps this yeare, and to belong to the owners of said cattel.

Evidently, those who were engaged in this new enterprise intended to utilize the vacant lands and at the same time establish a safe and profitable business for themselves; but Coleman, becoming dissatisfied, declined to carry out his part of the contract, and the General Court finally ordered a division of the grain that had been imported, and instructed each owner to take care of his own cattle.

- From: "**Ould Newbury**": *Historical and Biographical Sketches* by John J. Currier (1896), Damrell and Upham, Boston.