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The Range Township in Eighteenth-Century New Hampshire

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Between 1720 and 1750 the territory that became present-day New Hampshire was a virtual laboratory in which a variety of town planning concepts were tried and refined. Until 1740 much of this area was claimed by Massachusetts, and to bolster this claim the Massachusetts government aggressively laid out townships northward along the Merrimack River and in east-west strips from the Merrimack to the Connecticut rivers. The New Hampshire government, meanwhile, expanded its settlements beyond the constricted coastal territory of its original four towns. Laying out three contiguous tiers of townships from the present Maine border southwest to the lower Merrimack River, the New Hampshire government pushed to and even beyond the limits of the Massachusetts claim. As both these rival authorities granted, surveyed, and subdivided territory, they began an evolution in town planning that would ensure the permanent abandonment of the nucleated community plan that had been traditional in most of New England since the first settlement a century earlier.

After 1740 when the New Hampshire government finally established its claim to the present territory of the state (and, more tenuously, to much of Vermont as well), it granted scores of new townships on a standardized grid plan that in many respects anticipated the system later used west of the Appalachians by the federal government. At the same time a group of private New Hampshire investors, the Masonian Proprietors, acquired title to a vast tract of land in the center of the province and began to grant some forty townships on an equally standardized plan that likewise made use of rectangular lot and road grids. Together, the post-1740 New Hampshire government grants and those of the Masonian Proprietors perfected a plan that may be termed the "range township" — a plan in which equal-sized lots, separated by straight range roads, filled the territory of each township from edge to edge. Such planning encouraged the establishment of isolated farms of a hundred or more acres and greatly diminished the traditional New England focus on central villages with small home lots.

The evolution of the range township in New Hampshire may be traced to 1719. In that year the legislature granted a tract of land beyond the "head line" (western boundary) of the ancient town of

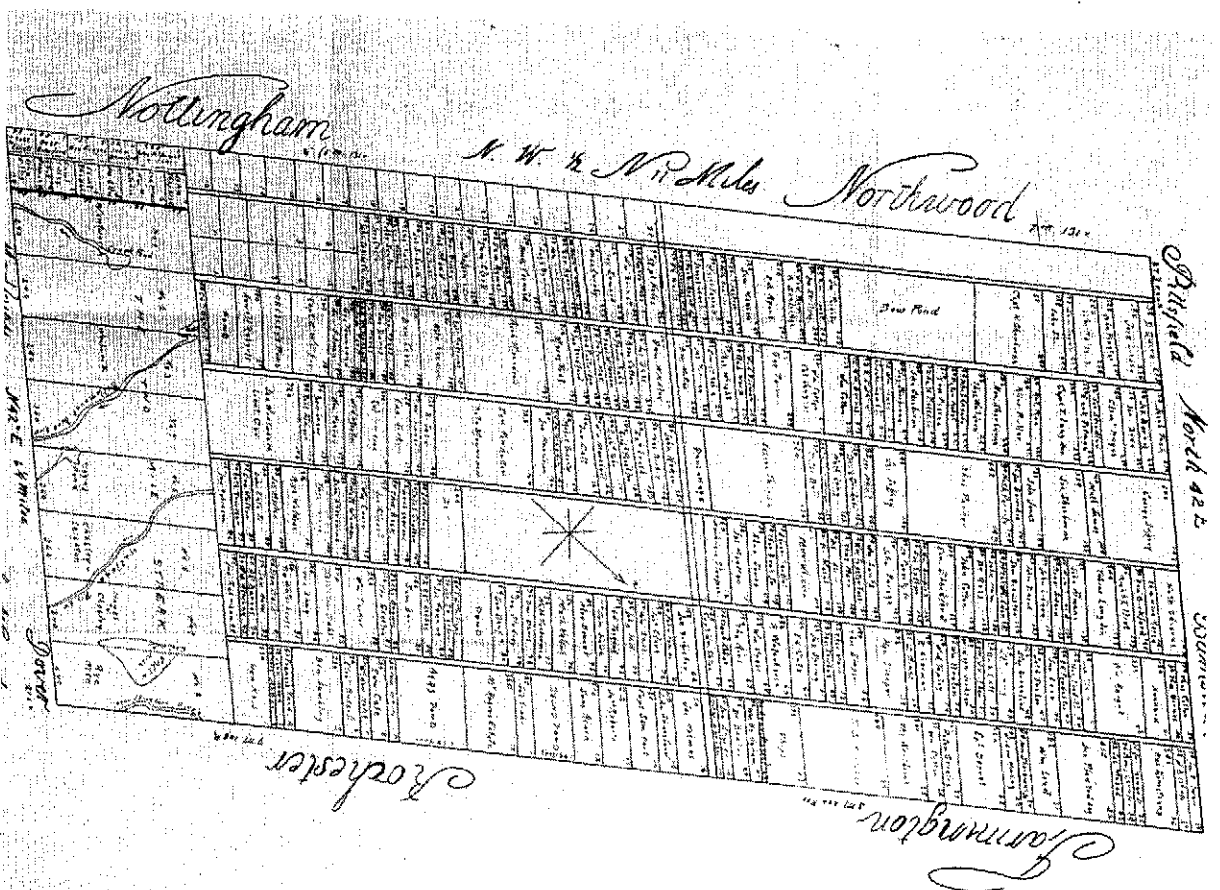


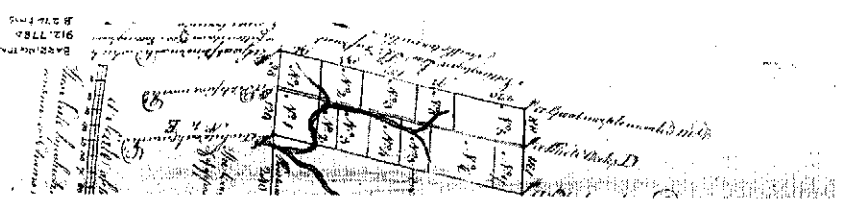
Figure 1 Plan of the Town of Barrington, 1730. Sixth-generation manuscript copy of lot arrangements in the town of Barrington, N.H., incorporating minor changes from a plan of 1722. The "Two-Mile Streak" of 1719 may be seen at the bottom of the map. [From Hattie Goss et al., *A History of Stafford, New Hampshire*, Stafford, N.H., 1971]

Dover to the proprietors of a proposed ironworks at Lamprey River for their "encouragement" and to supply them with fuel.¹ About six miles long and two miles deep, this "Two-Mile Streak" was later included within the bounds of Barrington (Figure 1), though its original pro-

1. Nathaniel Bouton et al., ed., *Documents and Papers Relating to the Province of New Hampshire, 1623-1800*, 40 vols. (Concord, N.H.: State of New Hampshire, 1867-1943), hereafter called *PPNH*. *PPNH*, 2:724, 3:753, 759. For a map of the Two-Mile Streak, see New Hampshire Province Deeds, 27:313.

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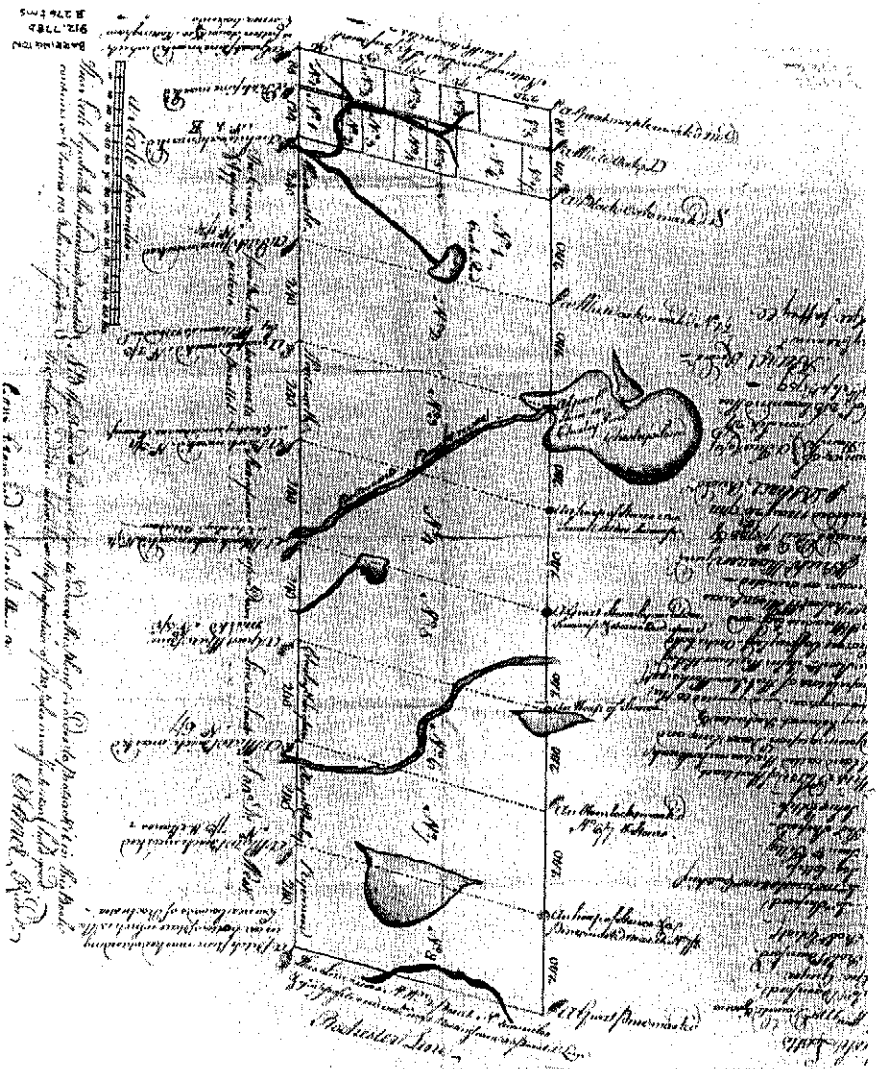
Figure 2 Plan rangement of 1 southeastern par Richard Hazzen,



prietors retained all their property rights. Eventually divided into eight large lots of 960 acres each and several smaller lots, the "Two-Mile Streak" of 1719 established precedents that almost immediately played a role in the planning of towns granted by the New Hampshire government. First, the tract was divided among major proprietors in fee simple for their private use or speculative resale. Each proprietor was a leading merchant or government figure in Portsmouth, and most became proprietors in new townships soon granted by the New Hampshire government. Second, the lots in the "Streak" were laid out in perfect and uniform parallelograms and together formed a large parallelogram (Figure 2). The regularity of this rectilinear grant and the speculative motives that underlay it were repeated many times in New Hampshire during the 1720s.

In 1719, the same year that the Two-Mile Streak was granted, a group of Scottish Presbyterians from northern Ireland settled in an ungranted area north of Haverhill, Massachusetts. They petitioned the Massachusetts General Court for a township in that area but, being re-

Figure 2 Plan of that tract of land called the two mile Streak, 23 October 1729. Lot arrangement of the "Two-Mile Streak" of 1719, later incorporated within the southeastern part of Barrington, N.H. 1759 manuscript copy of a map drawn by surveyor Richard Hazzen, Jr. (New Hampshire Historical Society)



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jected, turned to the New Hampshire government for a grant.² In 1722 New Hampshire granted these settlers a tract about ten miles square and incorporated them as the town of Londonderry.³

The petition of the Scotch-Irish settlers, combined with the precedent set by the grant of the Two-Mile Streak, opened the way for a major expansion of New Hampshire townships beyond the old western bounds of Dover, Exeter, and Hampton. In May 1722 New Hampshire granted four additional townships above Londonderry, creating a tier of townships that extended from the latter northeast to the Maine border. These new towns were incorporated as Chester, Nottingham, Barrington, and Rochester. Each of these adjacent tracts was surveyed and laid out in a somewhat different manner from the others, and among them they presented at least three distinctly different modes of town planning. In these four townships precedents were set that were to have far-reaching effects upon later settlement in New Hampshire; in them lay the seeds which eventually blossomed forth into the fully developed range township that characterized town planning in much of New Hampshire and Vermont during the mid- and late eighteenth century.

The northernmost of these towns, Rochester, was granted to a group of proprietors who were largely residents of the adjacent early town of Dover. The extensive tract granted to these proprietors included more than 60,000 acres. In 1727, after debating the best mode of settling this territory, the Rochester proprietors decided to lay out 125 lots, each containing sixty acres, in that part of the township adjacent to Dover and to run roads between each of the straight ranges of lots.⁴ In so voting, the proprietors entirely abandoned a compact mode of settlement; they essentially granted each proprietary share a complete though small farm of sixty acres. Moreover, within three years the proprietors granted each share another tract in a second land division. These second division lots, laid out on a much larger scale to the northwest of the first lots, were each 240 acres and again were planned on a regular grid of ranges separated by range roads (*Figure 3*).⁵

By 1730, then, Rochester had totally abandoned any semblance of nucleated settlement and had set a precedent by creating tier after tier of large independent farmsteads. The Rochester proprietors may have been inspired in their expansive plan by the example of Barrington, which lay adjacent to the southwest. Since 1672 Portsmouth had con-



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2. *PPNH*, 24:171.

3. *PPNH*, 25:272-78.

4. Franklin McDuffee, *History of the Town of Rochester*, 2 vols., (Manchester, N.H.: John B. Clarke Co., 1892), 1:42.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

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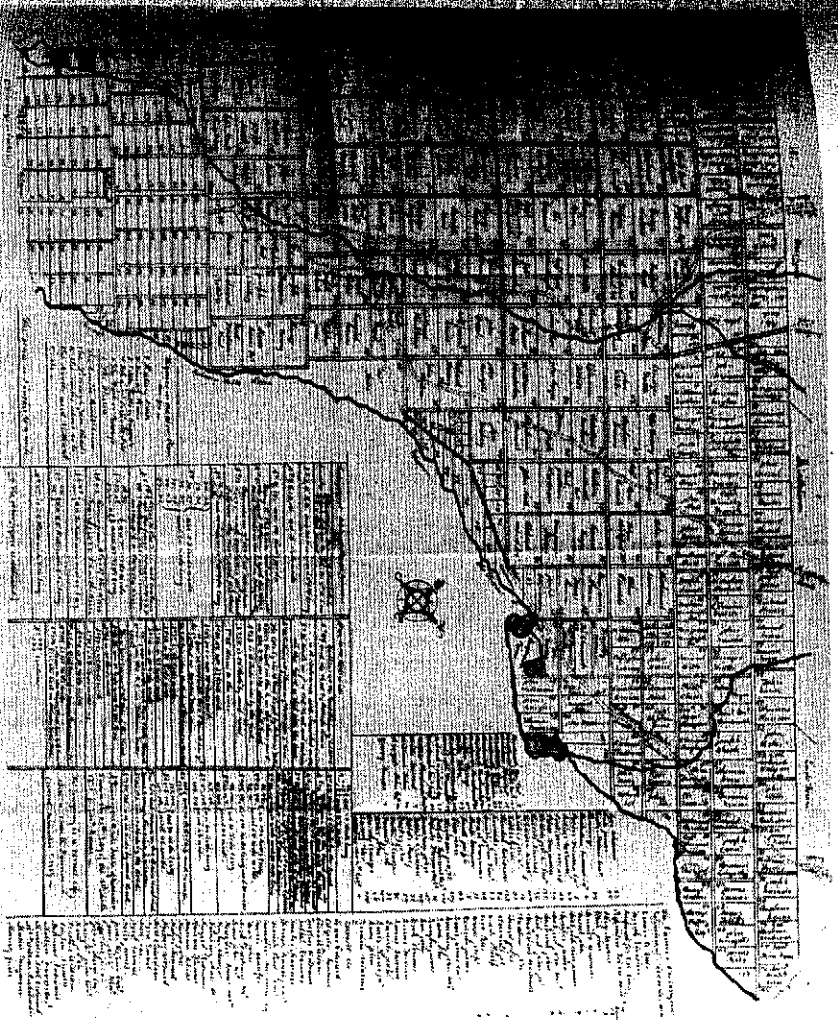


Figure 3 A Plan of the Whole Town of Rochester, 25 December 1775. Manuscript copy dated 1887 of the lot arrangements in Rochester, N.H. The 60-acre lots at the lower left were laid out in 1727; the 240-acre lots above them in 1730. [From Franklin McDuffee, *History of the Town of Rochester, New Hampshire, from 1722 to 1890*, Concord, N.H., 1895, vol. 1]

sidered obtaining a township in an unsettled area to provide new lands for the constricted inhabitants of the seaport.⁶ This tract became Barrington, granted in 1722 and laid out to embrace the already granted Two-Mile Streak and to extend some twelve miles farther to the northwest. Barrington was granted to all freeholders of Portsmouth who had paid taxes for at least three years, each portion being based upon the amount of tax paid in Portsmouth in 1722. Thus, land in Barrington was not distributed impartially in equal shares to all proprietors, as was the rule in most new townships laid out by either New Hampshire or Massachusetts; grants ranged from a mere six acres to over 600.

But the town plan of Barrington, surveyed in 1722 and again (with adjustments) in 1730, established two principles that were destined to have a powerful effect on later plans in New Hampshire. First, all land in the township was granted at once with no significant areas held in common for subsequent distribution. Second, all lots, large and small,

6 Portsmouth Town Records, City Clerk's Office, Portsmouth, N.H., 1:85, 88.

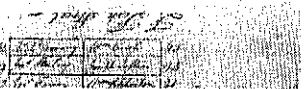
were of equal width and were arranged within the rigid lines of five great ranges of lots. Each range was about one mile wide and extended from the Two-Mile Streak to the northwestern limits of the township. All ranges were separated by "rangeways" or roads four rods wide, and near the center of the township a cross-range road traversed at right angles the width of the grant.

This grid system of lot and road arrangement had a parallel, of course, immediately northeast in the township of Rochester. But in Rochester only part of the township was laid out at first; the greater portion of the land was reserved in common ownership and was not distributed in second or third divisions until 1730, 1751, and later. In Barrington, on the other hand, nearly all the land was granted initially and was immediately available for development or resale without reference to the decision of other proprietors. This wholesale distribution of all the land in a grant later became a chief characteristic of the New Hampshire range township.

Was the grid system of land distribution and road layout, as seen in Barrington, Rochester, and other New Hampshire townships of the 1720s and later, merely a fiction on paper or did it persist as part of the mature road system of each township? In virtually all towns that initially utilized the range system of lot and road planning, a substantial number of the range roads became permanent rights-of-way. Due to geographical barriers like ponds and mountains, however, most range roads necessarily departed from the perfectly straight surveyor's line. A characteristic vote on the subject was made in Nottingham in 1727, when those charged with clearing roads and making them fit for transporting lumber were instructed that "where there are Steep hills or other difficult Places in sd Streets . . . they are to Shun ym by Turning the way round ym and coming [back] to sd Streets with the way again."⁷ Moreover, the pressing need to open a direct line of communication to the seacoast or to neighboring settlements required the establishment of routes which bore no relationship to range lines.⁸

Even as Rochester and Barrington were being laid out in a manner that prefigured the mature range township plan, neighboring New Hampshire grants to the south — Nottingham, Chester, and Londonderry — were being surveyed according to different ideas. A com-

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7. Elliott C. Cogswell, *History of Nottingham, Deerfield and Northwood* (Manchester, N.H.: John B. Clarke Co., 1878), p. 90; J. W. Goldthwait, "Old Range Roads in New Hampshire," *New Hampshire Highways* 8, no. 9 (December 1930): 4-6.
8. James W. Goldthwait, "The First Province Road, The Road from Durham to Co-os," *New Hampshire Highways* 9, no. 1 (April 1931): 1-5; Goldthwait, "The Governor's Road, From Rochester to Wolfeboro," *New Hampshire Highways* 9, no. 2 (May 1931): 1-5.
9. Cogswell, *History of Nottingham*, p. 80.

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parison between the two northern townships and their more southerly neighbors shows that different ideals of town planning were contending for primacy on the New Hampshire frontier of the 1720s.

Rochester was granted mostly to proprietors from Dover, and Barrington, solely to the taxpayers of Portsmouth. Nottingham, though granted by the New Hampshire government, included among its proprietary about one hundred grantees from Boston and Newbury, Massachusetts. Perhaps influenced by the Massachusetts heritage of nucleated settlement as well as by motives of protection, the petitioners for Nottingham stated their intention in 1721 "to settle the town compact and in as defensive a posture as the land will allow."⁹ When the New Hampshire government awarded their charter in May 1722, no requirement for a compact village was imposed. Yet the plan devised by the Nottingham proprietors in 1724 makes it clear that the majority of them continued to favor a compact village somewhat on the old Massachusetts model. They laid out a crossroads near the center of the township and at the intersection established a square thirty rods on each side as a meeting house site. Along the axes created by the roads, they laid out small home lots of five, eight, nine, or ten acres. The result was a small and regular village rather than the dispersed land holdings seen in Rochester and Barrington (Figure 4).

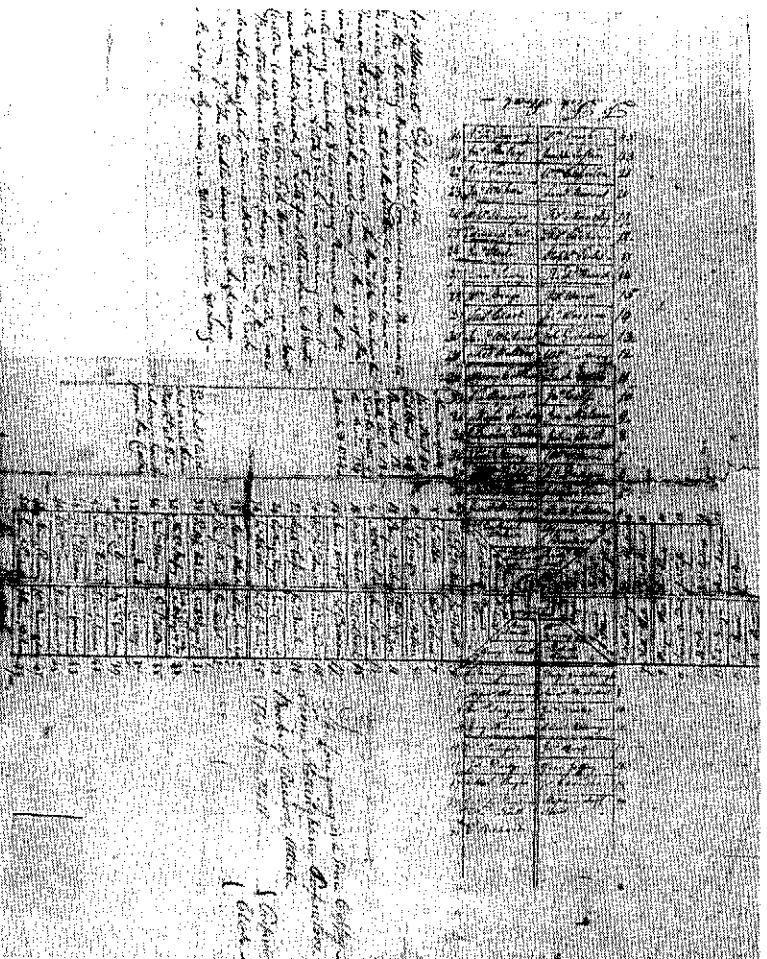


Figure 4 A true Copy From Nottingham Proprietors Books of Record. Manuscript copy of a 1724 map. Lot arrangements, Nottingham Square, Nottingham, N.H., showing lots ranging from five to ten acres each in area. [New Hampshire Historical Society]

¹ [Manchester, Roads in New
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Yet even as the Nottingham proprietors planned their nucleus, they must have been aware of the attractions offered by large isolated farmsteads. In 1730, the same year that Rochester laid out its second division of 240-acre lots, each Nottingham proprietor was granted a second lot on one of the four radiating roads. These lots, though varying somewhat in size according to the quality of the land, averaged one hundred acres apiece. And in 1732 the proprietors laid out a third division in which the surveyors were instructed to provide eleven ranges of lots which averaged 200 acres in extent. Each proprietor received two of these lots in different ranges in an attempt to ensure the impartial distribution of good and poor land throughout the township.

Much the same motivation seems to have governed the proprietors of Chester, the next grant south. Like the grantees of Nottingham, the proprietors of Chester laid out a crossroads village with relatively small home lots averaging twenty acres apiece. They had decided upon this plan in 1719, even before their petition for a grant was confirmed.¹⁰ In March 1721, however (again before receiving their grant), the Chester proprietors also determined to lay out a second division of land containing one hundred-acre lots.¹¹ This was finally accomplished in 1728, but meanwhile the proprietors had voted an additional fifty-acre lot to each shareholder. The hundred-acre lots, later referred to as the "Old Hundreds," were laid out in regular ranges and came to constitute much of the present town of Raymond. Succeeding divisions in Chester were also composed of large lots laid out in ranges.

Londonderry, the southernmost of the line of towns granted by New Hampshire in 1722, had been settled by a group of Scotch-Irish even before the grant was confirmed. These settlers never planned a compact village, preferring from the beginning to live on separate farmsteads.¹² The Londonderry lots averaged sixty acres each and were laid out in ranges.¹³ The ranges, however, were fitted together in a crazy-quilt pattern that bears little relationship to the subsequent development of town planning in New Hampshire.

In 1727 the New Hampshire government granted two additional lines of townships extending beyond the first tier from the northeast to the southwest. These new grants disposed of most of the land not claimed by Massachusetts as well as some that was vigorously defended by Massachusetts as part of its territory. The 1727 grants included

10. Benjamin Chase, *History of Old Chester* (Auburn, N.H.: Author, 1869), pp. 4, 33.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

12. Charles E. Clark, *The Eastern Frontier* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970), pp. 206-8.

13. Edward L. Parker, *History of Londonderry* (Boston: Perkins and Whipple, 1851), pp. 44-45.

14. John Wentworth to Samuel Shute, 19 February 1728/9. Wentworth Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society, Box 1, folder 1.

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the towns of Gilmanton, Barnstead, Canterbury, Chichest^{er}, Epsom, and Bow. Of these only Canterbury seems to have attracted an appreciable number of settlers in the early years. The remaining five languished until the 1750s or later. It is, nevertheless, significant that virtually all of these townships were laid out according to grid plans with lots arranged along regular range roads. In no case did any township revert to the compact village plans chosen earlier in Nottingham and Chester. While no township of the 1720s attained the perfect regularity of the mature range plan, all clearly prefigured the evolution of such an ideal.

The terms of every town charter granted by New Hampshire in the 1720s required that proprietors meet certain obligations in order to retain their holdings. Landowners were to build a certain number of houses and settle a corresponding number of families on their lands within three years; they were to clear and sow three or more acres of ground, they were to construct a meeting house, reserving certain amounts of land for support of the minister and the schools. Few of the proprietors of these early townships moved from the coast and actually settled on their new lands. Rather, they regarded their holdings more in the light of a speculative investment which, they hoped, would increase in value and become salable for a good profit at a later time. To encourage this increase in value and simultaneously meet the terms of their proprietary obligations, landowners usually followed one of two courses of action. Sometimes, as in Gilmanton, owners offered potential settlers incentives of free land or even cash in return for permanently settling within the township. In other cases proprietors would build a dwelling, pay for certain other improvements, and settle tenants on their land.

No better explanation of the method by which wealthy Portsmouth landowners improved their holdings and protected their investments can be found than a letter written in February 1729 by New Hampshire's Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth to former Governor Samuel Shute.

If you could Incurage some families to come over from England to settle your farms, it would do verry well. You will be Obliged to Support them for four or five years[;] it will cost about one hundred & twenty pounds of this money to make one Settlement, that is a small house & Barn, Two Oxen, two Cows, twenty bushells Corn & a barrell flesh [—] this is the way I have done by mine. [A]nd so they have the place for Six or Seven Years. then return the Oxen & Cows again, or such like cattle, if not the Same, and [I]also give them fifty Acres of Land in fee Simple the man being obligd'd to fence in proper fields And to Clear twelve or fifteen Acres of land within the time and then deliver it up, or to agree on a rent for time to come.¹⁴

A number of these tenancy agreements have come to light. In one case, Barrington proprietor Joshua Peirce and tenant Richard Swain agreed in 1732 that Swain would live on Peirce's farm for seven years. During the first four years Swain was to have the benefit of all his improvements on the land. During the last three years Swain was to pay a reasonable rent. In the course of the period, Swain was to clear "as much of the sd farme as shal be valued at fifty Pounds" and plant an orchard of sixty apple trees. For his part Peirce was to provide an initial fenced clearing of three or four acres, build a small house, provide a yoke of oxen, three cows, three calves, two swine, and purchase the apple trees for Swain to plant. At the conclusion of the seven-year term, Peirce was to give Swain about one hundred acres elsewhere in Barrington.¹⁵

The diary of Peirce's kinsman, Nathaniel, shows that such arrangements became standard among the proprietors of New Hampshire townships. Nathaniel Peirce owned land in Barrington and land and a sawmill in neighboring Nottingham. Throughout the 1750s, Peirce made frequent trips from Portsmouth to inspect his holdings, to oversee the construction of houses, barns, dams, and mills, and to conclude tenancy agreements with a number of farmers who were settled on his lands.¹⁶

In seeking to get their lands settled and improved to maximum benefit, such investors had little use for the small home lots in villages like Nottingham or Chester. In a letter of 1730, Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth, one of the largest landholders in New Hampshire by reason of his office, advised a correspondent where to settle tenants within a township: "Where the home lott is 20, 30, 40, or Sixty acres, then it's on ye home Lott[;] if less, then on the Second Division."¹⁷ The determination of men like Wentworth not to waste tenants' efforts on small holdings, but rather to concentrate on forty- or sixty-acre farms in outlying ranges, makes it clear why compact villages ceased to be favored in New Hampshire and why the improvement of range lots into substantial working farms became standard practice.

Even as the New Hampshire government was granting the tiers of townships discussed above, Massachusetts was planning township grants in parts of present-day New Hampshire. The first of these was at Penacook (now Concord), where the broad and fertile intervals or flood plains of the Merrimack had attracted the interest of potential

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15. New Hampshire Province Deeds, 18:447.

16. Nathaniel Peirce, *Journal* (1754-1759). Wendell Collection, Baker Library, Harvard Business School, V-ITC-1.

17. John Wentworth to unidentified correspondent, 15 June 1730. Wentworth Papers, New Hampshire Historical Society, Box 1, folder 1.

18. Clifford K. S. Historical Society

19. Edna Scofield *Geographical Rev*

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lers since the seventeenth century. Penacook was granted to a up of Massachusetts proprietors in 1725. These men employed hard Hazzen, Jr., a noted surveyor from Haverhill, to lay out their in 1726 and 1727.¹⁸ The contrast between the Penacook plan and use of such New Hampshire townships as Rochester and Barrington provides a fascinating indication of the differences between Massachu- and New Hampshire town planning in the 1720s.

The plan of Penacook conforms closely to what Edna Scofield, one of the first to investigate the evolution of town planning in New England, referred to as a "highway village" which "represents a transitional form between the compact village communities of the earlier colonial period and the scattered, isolated farmsteads of the later period."¹⁹ The proprietors of Penacook laid out a long, straight road on the west side of the Merrimack, and along both sides of this road they placed a multitude of small house lots that averaged one and a half acres apiece. In order that each proprietor should also receive a share of the valuable intervalle land, the proprietors distributed a corresponding number of six-acre lots on the flood plain. The result was a compact village with outlying agricultural lands, very much on the model of some seventeenth-century Massachusetts plans. Later, between 1732 and 1734, the proprietors subdivided a portion of the common lands in other parts of the township into twenty-acre lots (*Figure 5*).

Much the same concept persisted in some towns laid out by Massachusetts as late as the mid-1730s. In Contoocook (now Boscawen), granted by Massachusetts in 1732 immediately north of Penacook, settlers laid out home lots of five acres each along a road, adding intervalle lots of the same size for each proprietary share. In Upper Ashuelot (now Keene), granted in 1732, the settlers laid out eight-acre home lots as a deliberate choice over larger lots in order that "the Settlement may be made in a Defensible manner." In Lower Ashuelot (now Swanze), proprietors similarly laid out sixty-three home lots of six acres each in 1734.

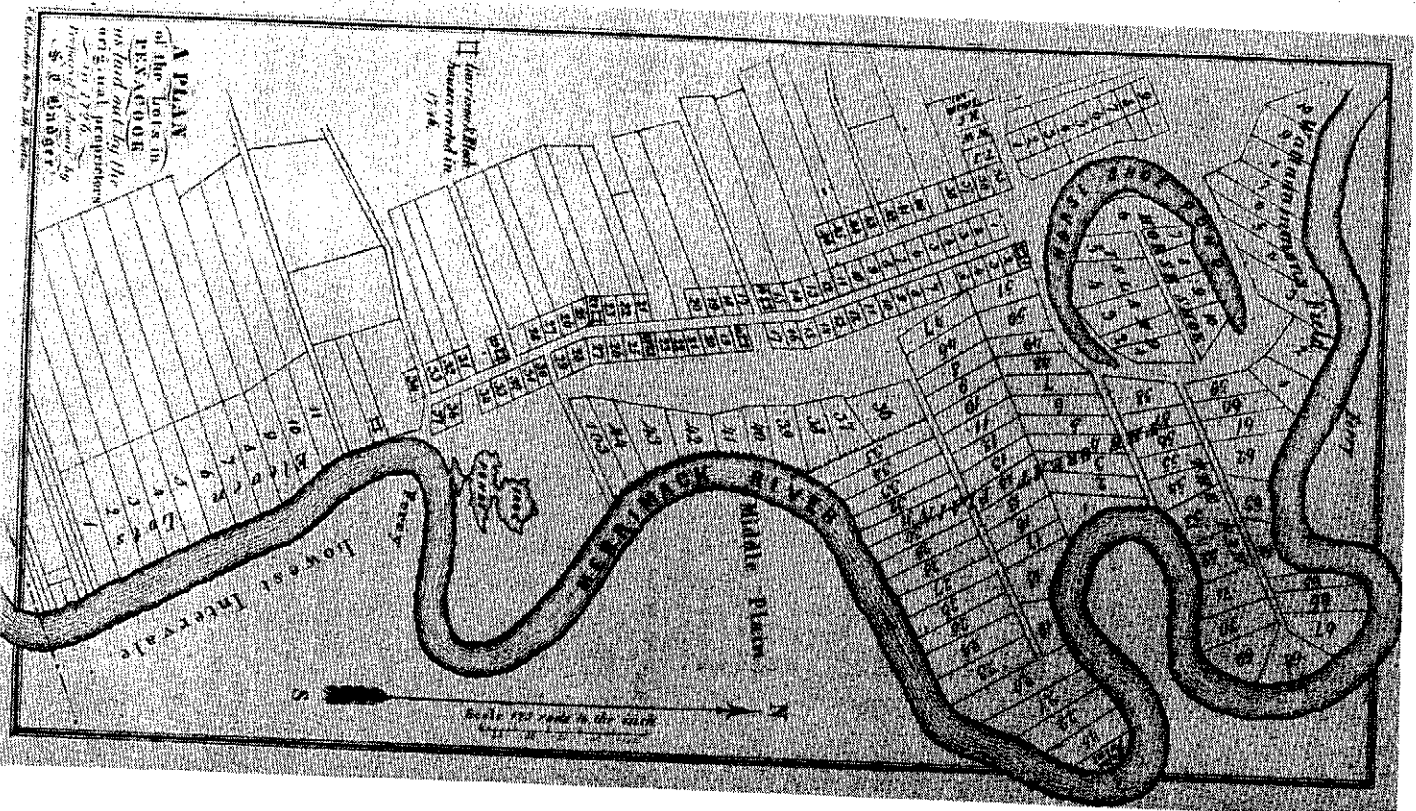
In all of these townships, Massachusetts proprietors adhered closely to the seventeenth-century precedent of nucleated townships with most of the land held in common for later distribution. Beginning about 1730, however, other Massachusetts grants were laid out in clear emulation of some of the earlier New Hampshire townships. In most cases, towns laid out on this more expansive plan were "soldiers' townships" — grants of land made as bounties to those who had served in various military campaigns. Perhaps because the land grants in

18. Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, vol. 6 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1942), pp. 186-91.

19. Edna Scofield, "The Origin of Settlement Patterns in Rural New England," *Geographical Review* 28 (1938): 652-63.

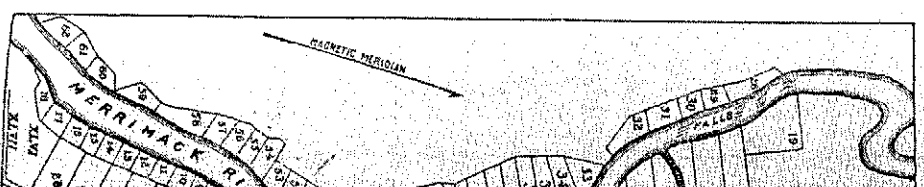
these townships were viewed as payment for services rendered, and were therefore regarded as in lieu of a cash bounty, the lots tended to be laid out more on the New Hampshire model than in a nucleated

Figure 5 A Plan of the Lots in Penacook, as laid out . . . in 1726. Lot arrangement in the village of Penacook, N.H., showing house lots aligned along the road at the left, six-acre interval lots extend along the Merrimack River at the right. (Lithograph print of map prepared by S. C. Badger for Nathaniel Bouton, *The History of Concord*, Concord, N.H., 1856)



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Figure 6 Untitled map of Suncook, N.H. Roman numerals indicate lots. (Pembroke, New



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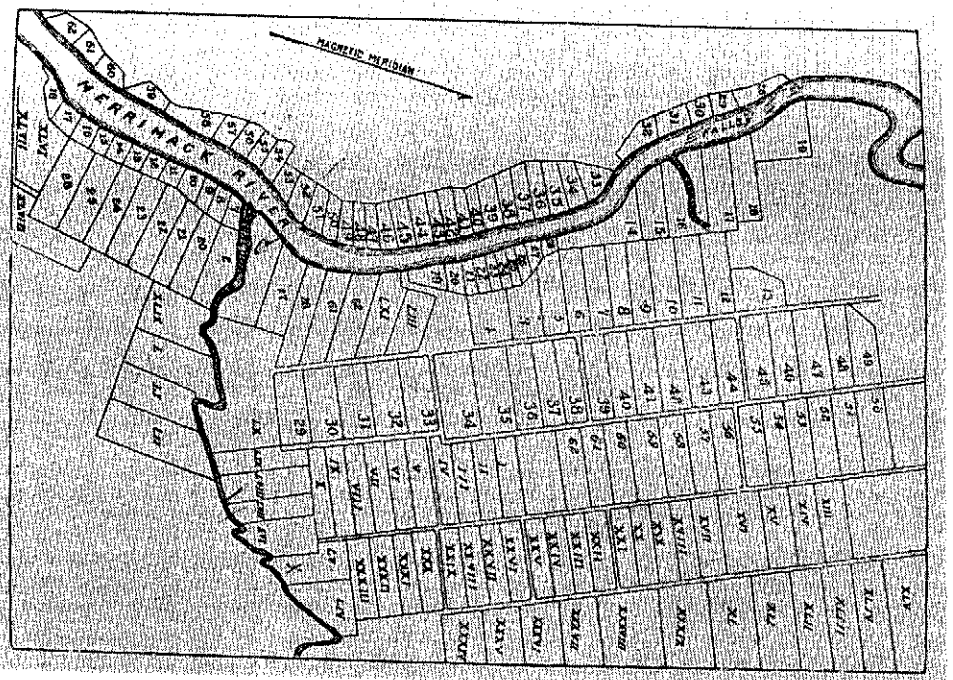
as rendered, and the lots tended to be in a nucleated

Lot arrangement in road at the left, six. (Lithograph print of Concord, Concord,

fashion. Precedent for this attitude is offered by Voluntown, Connecticut, which was granted in 1705 to veterans of King Philip's and other colonial wars in "150 farms of nearly equal size."²⁰

The first of these "soldiers' townships" granted by Massachusetts within the territory of present-day New Hampshire was Lovewell's Town or Suncook. This tract, immediately south of Penacook, was granted in 1728 to forty-seven soldiers who had served three years earlier in Capt. John Lovewell's fight with the Indians at Pigwacket. The proprietors of Suncook departed radically from those of nearby Penacook when in 1729 they voted to lay out part of their township in sixty lots, all of which were to be forty acres or more in area. These lots were laid out in three ranges and were accompanied by corresponding

Figure 6 Untitled map drawn in 1895 showing lot arrangements in Lovewell's Town or Suncook, N.H. Lots with Arabic numbers were laid out in 1729-1730; those with Roman numerals in 1736. (From Nathan F. Carter and Trueworthy L. Fowler, *History of Pembroke, New Hampshire, 1730-1895*, Concord, N.H., 1895, vol. 1.)



20. Anthony N.B. Garvan, *Architecture and Town Planning in Colonial Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 65.

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and allocations like these, made throughout the late 1730s and the 1740s, reinforce Charles E. Clark's observations on the settlement of new townships on the "eastern frontier."

As long as proprietors and legislation remained scrupulously faithful to the community ideals of seventeenth-century Massachusetts, they remained a barrier to the realization of the dream of full enjoyment of a family country estate. Under these conditions most prospective settlers found the prospective cost and risk of going into the wilderness unacceptable. Upon a realistic appraisal of the situation, proprietors and legislators began, generally in the 1750s, to remove the barriers to spontaneous, as opposed to planned, development. With the barriers down . . . communities of dispersed, integrated farms, located according to the suitability of the land and the desires of the individual settlers rather than according to an imposed scheme — grew rapidly to maturity.²²

The maturation of the community of dispersed farms — the fully developed range township — was ensured by the advent of new systems of land distribution in New Hampshire in the 1750s. During most of the 1740s, due in part to Indian hostility, new township grants diminished in the province and a number of incipient settlements on the frontier were abandoned. At the same time, however, a combination of events made it inevitable that the 1750s would see the granting of new townships on an unprecedented scale.

The first crucial development was the settlement of the boundary between Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1740. After a long and obstinately contended battle, this boundary was determined by the king in council to be a line running due west from a point three miles north of Pawtucket Falls on the Merrimack (the site of present-day Lowell). This decision gave New Hampshire an unexpected wealth of land, encompassing many of the old Massachusetts-granted townships like Contoocook, Penacook, Narragansett No. 3 and 5, and Upper and Lower Ashuelot. Moreover, the western limits of New Hampshire's boundary were stated vaguely and could be construed to include present-day Vermont.

Part of New Hampshire's victory in her dispute with Massachusetts included the appointment of a full royal governor for the province, which had formerly shared its governor with Massachusetts. Benning Wentworth (1696-1770), son of former Lieutenant-Governor John Wentworth, was appointed governor in 1741. As a merchant and a scion of the land-speculating Portsmouth oligarchy, Wentworth inherited the incentives and received the power to make land grants on a scale never before seen in New Hampshire.

Meanwhile, however, an unexpected development introduced itself into the question of New Hampshire lands. In 1746 a group of wealthy Portsmouth merchants, including Benning Wentworth's brother-in-law, two of his brothers, and seven others who were related to the governor by marriage, quietly purchased the proprietary claim to New Hampshire lands that had descended to the heirs of Capt. John Mason, the original grantee of New Hampshire in the early seventeenth century. Mason's heirs claimed ownership of all lands in New Hampshire within a great arc drawn with a radius of sixty miles from the sea. This huge tract included all the townships hitherto granted by the New Hampshire government as well as many granted by Massachusetts before the resolution of the provincial boundary dispute.

Wentworth, who had previously planned to purchase the Mason claim for the province, was irate at this development and threatened to sue the purchasers. The new proprietors were shrewd enough to grant quitclaim deeds for all the settled lands within their purchase, thereby allaying public anxiety. The king's attorney was compelled to advise Wentworth against pressing his suit since the proprietors' renunciation of their claim to improved lands made it certain that no provincial court would rule against them.²³ Wentworth was forced to watch with impotent anger as his relatives and fellow government officials granted township after township on their private holdings, in every case making provisions that were calculated to enrich themselves and their heirs in the process.

The Masonian Proprietors began their grants in December 1748, having already received thirty-one petitions for township grants in various parts of their claim.²⁴ The method by which the proprietors distributed lands in their new grants established the model of the range township once and for all as the standard for town planning in New Hampshire (Figure 7). Most Masonian townships were either six miles square or, if topography precluded rectilinear boundaries, approximately thirty-six square miles in area. Being free of all royal restrictions, and wishing only to expedite the distribution and settlement of land, the Masonian Proprietors typically granted all the territory within a township at once. No common lands were retained for later distribution. Lots of perfectly regular size were laid out in ranges, separated by range roads, from border to border within each grant. No small village lots were laid out, although a general desire among inhabitants for a "central place" in which to conduct public functions

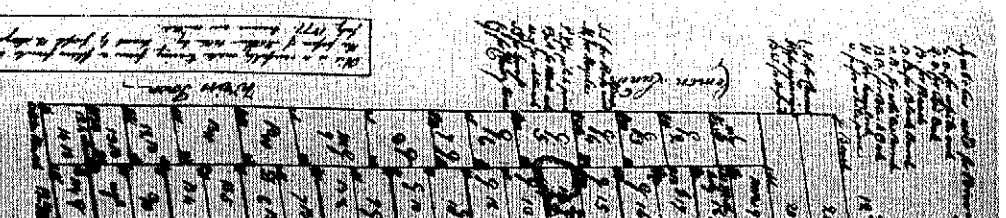


Figure 7 The pattern. Lot arrangement and surveyed 1752
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23. John F. Looney, "Benning Wentworth's Land Grant Policy: A Reappraisal," *Historical New Hampshire* 23, no. 1 (Spring 1968):5.

24. William Henry Fry, *New Hampshire as a Royal Province*. Columbia University Studies in History, Economics and Public Law 29, no. 2 (New York, 1908), pp. 310-11.

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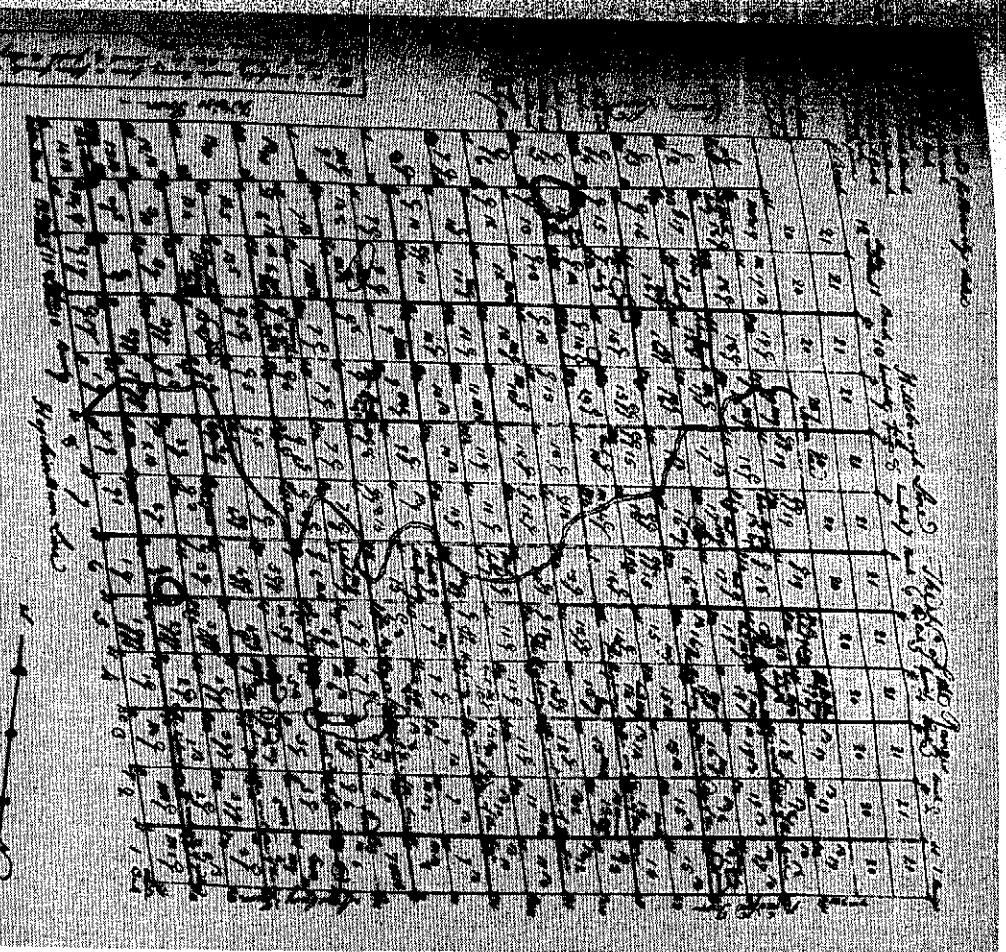


Figure 7 The plan of No. Six, 1877. Tracing of a plan by Daniel Lesley and Matthew Patten. Lot arrangement, Henniker, N.H., granted by the Masonian Proprietors in 1752 and surveyed 1752-1753. (From Leander W. Cogswell, *History of the Town of Henniker New Hampshire*, Concord, N.H., 1880)

and trade often resulted in the eventual appearance of one or more villages in Masonian townships. Lots in these townships averaged at least one hundred acres in area. In order to ensure the equitable distribution of good and indifferent soils to each grantee, the proprietors granted each shareholder two or three lots in different parts of the township. The grant of Henniker, for example, stipulated that the whole Tract of Land . . . be Divided into Eighty Rights or equal Shares and each Share into three Lots which are to be so Sorted and joined as to make the Shaers as Equall as Possibal Both for Quality and quantitey. . . .²⁵

²⁵ Leander W. Cogswell, *History of the Town of Henniker* (Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Assn., 1880), p. 36.

Leodore Atkinson, provincial secretary, brother-in-law to Benning Wentworth, and leader among the Masonian Proprietors, summarized the strategy of the proprietors in a letter of 1758.

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As Benning Wentworth watched the successful application of this approach among the Masonian Proprietors, he was naturally eager to emulate their success. Wentworth had vast ungranted territories under his jurisdiction, and the royal instructions given him upon his assumption of the governorship in 1741 had encouraged the settlement of townships, each to encompass about 20,000 acres, "on the Frontiers of your Province."²⁸ Choosing to interpret the latter phrase in as generous a manner as possible, Wentworth began his program of land grants with the chartering of Bennington in the southwest corner of present-day Vermont on 3 January 1750. In the next four years Wentworth made sixteen such grants; when he resumed granting townships in 1761, near the end of the Seven Years' War, he did so at such a rate that he had chartered 128 new towns west of the Connecticut River by the time he left office in 1767.²⁹

In making these grants, Wentworth asserted jurisdiction over a huge area that rendered the scale of grants made by the Masonian Proprietors insignificant by comparison. Wentworth was not, however, so secure in his jurisdiction as were the proprietors. Governor Clinton of New York immediately challenged Wentworth's right to make grants west of the Connecticut River, and this dispute lasted for years. Nor was Wentworth so free as the Masonian Proprietors in establishing the terms under which his grants were made. Although his office empowered him to grant town charters for each of his grants (a power denied the Masonian Proprietors by reason of their status as private landowners), Wentworth was bound by rigid royal instructions. While he was free to reserve to himself a tract or "farm" of 500 acres in each new township he granted (and this was one of his primary motivations in making grants on such an extensive scale), Wentworth was not able to offer settlers the relatively generous terms provided by the Masonian Proprietors.

Under the royal instructions that controlled his land-granting authority, Wentworth was bound by several restrictions. He could make grants only to persons who would guarantee to improve the land. He could not grant any township until fifty or more families were ready to begin settlement. He was restricted from granting more than fifty acres for every man, woman, or child in the grantee's family. He was forced to require that three acres of every fifty be improved within five years. He was required to establish a site for a village near the

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27. Theodore Atkinson to John Thominson, 27 January 1758. *PPNH*, 18:470.

28. Albert Stillman Batchelor, ed., *Laws of New Hampshire*, vol. 2 (Concord, N.H.: State of New Hampshire, 1913), p. 620.

29. Looney, "Benning Wentworth's Land Grant Policy," p. 12.

center of each township with tiny one-acre home lots in that village. He was compelled to charge a quit-rent after the township had been settled for ten years.³⁰

Wentworth protested the rigidity of these instructions, noting especially that unless settlers "can have from three to five hundred acres to a family, they don't think it a Suitable Encouragement, as the Lands before their Labour and Industry is laid out upon it, is of Little or no Value."³¹ In the end, convinced that more generous terms were necessary to encourage the settlement of frontier townships, Wentworth chose to adhere to certain of his instructions, to observe others only in a pro forma fashion, and to ignore some completely.

The plan of Bennington, Wentworth's initial grant west of the Connecticut River, reveals the compromises that the governor might make between his royal instructions and the already established ideal of the Masonian township (*Figure 8*). Being free of any adjacent grants, the township of Bennington was oriented with its six-mile boundaries running north and south, east and west. The land area was divided into sixty-four equal shares, each of which received a single square lot of 360 acres rather than the "50 acres for each Person in [each] family" required by royal instruction. All lots were laid out in ranges. At the geographical center of the township, where the middle range roads crossed, a small tract was reserved for "Town Lots, one of which Shall be Allotted to Each Grantee, of the Contents of One Acre."³² Wentworth adhered to the instruction that "every Grantee . . . Shall Plant And Cultivate Five Acres of Land within the Term of five years for Every fifty Acres Contained in his or thier Share"³³ — meaning that each grantee was required to clear thirty-five or more acres within five years.

The result of this plan, and of a number like it that Wentworth authorized in the next seventeen years, was that grantees received townships that might differ little in plan from those being offered by the Masonian Proprietors. Most of Wentworth's towns, like those of the proprietors, were either approximately six miles square or thirty-six square miles in area. While the proprietors generally assigned two or three lots in various parts of a township to each grantee, Wentworth often permitted the granting of a single lot to each share. While the proprietors reserved no home lots for a compact village, Wentworth usually encouraged the placement of a group of small lots near the center of his townships; these might or might not develop into a real village

1	N. 1	Thos. Wright
2	John Wentworth	Walter
3	Thos. Wentworth	Simon Shaw
4	Elyah Williams	Thos. Gould
5	Charles Doolittle	John Will
6	Ann Mins	Thos. Rice
7	Edw. Langstaff	Thos. D.
8	Samuel Smith	John Ma

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30. Batchelor, ed., *Laws of New Hampshire*, 2:620-21.
31. *PPNH*, 18:198-200; cf. Looney, "Benning Wentworth's Land Grant Policy," p. 6.
32. *PPNH*, 26:31.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

royal instructions that Wentworth routinely copied into each township charter. Settlers who found that their grant had especially fertile soils might wish to divide these valuable but limited lands into small lots and perhaps plan a village nearby. The proprietors of Haverhill, New Hampshire, did just this. Acquiring some of the richest intervalle lands in New England, they divided their portion of the Connecticut River flood plain into small fields that were reminiscent of those in Penacook, giving each proprietor a share of this valuable asset. They then laid out a village just above the intervalles, again repeating the older plans of Penacook or Contoocook. The remainder of the township, however, they laid out in ranges of one hundred-acre lots. It is evident that Wentworth's royal instructions could be interpreted in different ways. It was even possible to construe them to indicate a nucleated village; and certain settlers from Connecticut and Massachusetts, accustomed to the nucleated settlement with its irregular outlying lots, reverted to such plans in new Hampshire. The settlers of Canaan (who were mostly from Connecticut) established a village and slowly parcelled out the remaining lands of the township in a multitude of "pitches" of every conceivable shape and size, essentially replicating the nucleated pattern of the old Connecticut towns on the New Hampshire frontier.

Despite such affectionate returns to the ideas of the seventeenth century, or such common-sense departures from the grid plan as were taken by the settlers of Haverhill, the range township was clearly the preferred form of land distribution in New Hampshire by the mid-eighteenth century. The evolution of the range plan had required some twenty-five years. Beginning tentatively in the grants made by the New Hampshire government in 1722, and initially resisted in those made soon thereafter by Massachusetts, the range township found favor with the Masonian Proprietors and Benning Wentworth alike. The range plan was a physical reflection of a social change that historians have already discerned in mid-eighteenth-century New England: the move away from centralized villages and centralized authority.

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