

1895

# A brief history of the Town of Unity

Edmund Murch

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A

BRIEF HISTORY

— OF THE —

TOWN OF UNITY.

WRITTEN AND READ BY

EDMUND MURCH.

AT A MEETING OF

Harvest Moon Grange, Thorndike,

1892.

BELFAST:

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# HISTORY.

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After considerable research, I have noted such facts as have come to my knowledge in relation to the early settlement of Unity.

The first settlement commenced within the limits of the town were begun at or near the outlet of the twenty-five mile pond ; so called from the fact that it was estimated by the early pioneers to be that distance from the fort now standing at the junction of the Sebacook with the Kennebec river, in the town of Winslow. Two men by the name of Carter and Ware built log houses there some time before the commencement of the war of independence (the exact time I have been unable to ascertain) and at the breaking out of hostilities, abandoned their homes from fear of the Indians, moving with their families to the fort at Winslow, Carter returning after the close of the war to his early home where he lived many years, some of his descendants having lived here long since my remembrance. Ware never returned. After the defeat of our forces at Bagaduce, the soldiers together with many of the citizens of that place, attempted to make their way through an unbroken wilderness to

the settlements on the Kennebec, and in order to cross the stream near where Ware's cabin stood, tore the house down to get the logs to construct a raft on which to cross. Brother Crosby Fowler tells me (and I here acknowledge my obligation to Brother Fowler for his kindness in furnishing me many items in relation to the early history of Unity) he well remembers hearing his grandfather relate that he, a boy of fifteen, with his father were engaged in cutting hay on meadows, somewhere on the Sebastcook, when these fleeing soldiers came into the meadow. He fled to the settlement and reported that the Indians were coming, and had captured his father, but his father soon came leading the most forlorn looking set of men he ever saw, and succeeded in quieting what almost proved to be a panic. But as this is digressing somewhat from our subject, I will return. After Carter's return and the acknowledgment of our independence, came Mr. Stephen Chase in 1782, settling on the horseback, near the east shore of the pond, where the railroad now crosses. Mr. Chase built the first frame house built in Unity. The Chases and their posterity are noted for their longevity. Mr. Chase died at the age of eighty, Mrs. Chase living to the great age of over one hundred and six years. Mrs. Bethiah Hussey and Mrs. Tilton, children of Mr. and Mrs. Chase, living well into their ninety-ninth years; Mrs. Cook, a grand-daughter now living in Unity, quite smart, past her eighty-third birthday; Mr. T. B. Hussey, formerly of Unity but now of Montana, a grandson of Mr. and Mrs. Chase, is past eighty-five, hale and hearty. Of the other grandchildren there are now living Esther

Taber aged ninety, Jane Morse eighty-five, Bethiah Rolins eighty-three, Hulda Wingate eighty-one, Hezekiah Rackliff eighty, Stephen Tilton eighty-seven, James Pope eighty-five. There was also Mrs. Peter Ayer who died recently at the age of ninety-five.

Mr. Clement Rackliff moved from Limington to Unity in 1792, came with an ox team; he fell the first trees and cleared the farm afterwards owned and occupied by Elisha Mosher, and now occupied by Edmund Hussey. Mr. Rackliff came to Unity a poor man but long before his death (which was at the age of eighty-three) he was an independent farmer. Benjamin and Lemuel Bartlett came to Unity about the same time that Mr. Rackliff came. One of them had an ax and the other had an ox chain, which constituted their worldly possessions except the clothes they wore. They both became wealthy men for the time in which they lived, for it did not require as much property to make a man wealthy as it does at the present time.

Mr. Simeon Murch moved to Unity from Gorham in 1794. He and Mrs. Murch came on horseback over one hundred miles, over bad roads where there were any, and brought two children, each of them one, a feather bed, a foot wheel, besides some dishes and clothing. They settled and built a log house in the forest on the farm now owned and occupied by Ephriam Jones, about one and one half miles from what is now Unity village, where they raised a family of eight children. This family (especially the children of those pioneers) was also somewhat noted for longevity. Mr. Murch met with

an accident and died at sixty-four. Mrs. Murch died at eighty-six. Of the eight children Josiah lived to the age of ninety-three; J. B., who was a lawyer and lived in Belfast was seventy-two at his death. Jephtha left home when a young man and died in Michigan at eighty one, Rebekah seventy-one, Esther, who married Moses Boynton, at eighty-four, Ephriam eighty-three, Betsey, who married George Sinclair, ninety-two, and Richard now living in Unity, past ninety-one, very smart for a man of that age.

John Melvin and wife came from Manchester, N. H., to Unity in 1795. They performed the journey on horseback and brought one or two children with all their earthly possessions, which were the horses they rode and but very little besides. He brought apple seeds to plant an orchard which is still bearing fruit. He settled on the farm on which his grandson, John M. Thompson, now lives. Mr. Melvin was a soldier in the war of the Revolution and drew a pension until his death which was at a good old age. I recollect when quite a young boy of listening to his war stories with a good deal of interest.

Mr. Joseph Woods and wife moved from Standish to Unity in 1796, brought one child and some household furniture and settled in the forest on the farm now owned and occupied by his son, Benjamin Woods. Mr. Woods was noted for honesty and integrity, and also for his temperate habits, never having drank a glass of intoxicating liquor or used any tobacco or drank any tea or coffee during his long life, which was something very remarkable at that time. Mr. Woods died at the age



of ninety-three, Mrs. Woods at eighty-nine, they having lived together as man and wife seventy-three years.

William McGray moved from Durham to Unity in 1802, settled in the forest near where Samuel Webb now lives; some five or six years afterwards moved to the place owned by the late Hiram Harding, and now owned by Joseph Harding. He soon after moved to the farm now owned and occupied by his son William, where he died at the age of eighty-four years. Mr. McGray was a somewhat noted preacher of the Methodist persuasion and was a member of the legislature before the State was divided.

Mark Libby moved from Gorham in 1803; came on horseback and settled on what was then called the McKenney place, but in a few years moved to the place owned and occupied by his grandson, Nathan Libby, where he died at the age of eighty-four years.

In 1807, Robert Carll came from the town of Lyman to this town, and Brother Fowler tells me that Mr. Carll told him before his death, which occurred in 1882, that there were but two frame houses that were completed when he came, one where Richard Whitten now lives and the other on what was then called "dog hill" where George I. Fowler formerly lived.

Some time ago I told Brother Fowler that I was trying to write a little sketch of the town and he seemed much interested and kindly wrote me some facts in relation to the early settlement of the town. I will quote from him. He says the oldest barn in town is on the place where I now live, which was built about 1797 and

was the second frame barn built in town, Mr. Chase having built one before that time, which was afterwards moved to the place where Oliver Whitten now lives, and was burned there. The boards to cover the barn now standing were hauled from the Seabasticook and twelve men came from there to assist in the raising, staying all night and returning next day. The same boards still cover it, being matched and apparently in good condition. ✓ The roof was formerly covered with long shingles, but have long since given way to boards and shingles. Brother Fowler adds, "I have heard my uncle, General James Fowler who is still living, aged about ninety-four years, relate that when a small boy his mother sent him up to Mrs. Chase's to borrow a darning needle for a few days, until she could mend up the family clothing, when he himself carried it back." Brother Fowler does not tell me how far he traveled, but I know of my own knowledge of the distance, he must have traveled over sixteen miles to borrow and return that needle.

Among the very early settlers of the town was a man by the name of Barnes, settling where Richard Whitten now lives, Thomas Fowler where Crosby Fowler now lives, and a Mr. Fly, where the Gilpatricks have since lived. These settlers came from Seabasticook, since named Benton. In 1790 was born the first child in Unity and named Betsey Fowler, who married Thomas Bradstreet, and has children still living in the town of Albion.

Henry Farwell moved from Chester, N. H., to Unity in 1788, and settled on farm afterwards owned and oc-



cupied by Jacob Trueworthy, near where Mr. Mussey now lives, but in a few years moved to the farm now occupied by his son, Hon. Joseph Farwell, which was then a dense forest—Mr. Farwell falling the first trees ever cut on the place. He also built the first grist and the first saw mill built in town. He had a family of twenty-one children. Mr. Farwell held a Justice's commission many years and done considerable business in town. In connection with this gristmill built by Mr. Farwell there is an incident, as related by Mrs. Thompson, who was one of the first settlers of Montville, that to us who see the country as it is to-day, with its roads and means of communication seems almost incredible. She settled on what is known as Goosepecker ridge, near the village in Freedom. She says they had their milling done in Vassalborough and had no knowledge of the mill built by Mr. Farwell until one morning they heard the sound of a mill to the north and her husband and one of the neighbors started through the woods and found what they had not the least idea of, a mill within four or five miles. This can be readily accounted for when we take into account that the whole distance between the two places was a dense forest and that the Plymouth grant which extended from the Kennebec river fifteen miles to about where the line now is, between Unity and Knox. Knox was settled from the vicinity of Fort Halifax, while the Waldo grant was settled from the coast, where the proprietors of that grant lived, and sent its settlers, and the two streams of emigration first met at Farwell's mills, in Unity. It must have been a

great surprise to those hardy pioneers when they discovered almost at their own doors a mill, when they had for years either carried on their own backs or the back of some animal, all the grain used by themselves and families, either to Winslow or Vassalborough, a distance of twenty miles or more.

Mr. John Perley moved from Winchendon, Mass., in the year 1800, and took a farm in Unity—the farm owned by the late Otis F. Stevens. He built a log camp in the woods on what is now Moses Stevens' pasture, near Mr. Fletcher's, made a clearing in the forest, then returned to Massachusetts, and the next spring came back with his wife and two children, and made his home in the forest. They saw many hardships, as did nearly all the early settlers of Unity, but were hopeful and happy. Fish and game were plenty, and being an expert fisherman and a good gunner, his fishing rod and his gun supplied the table when other resources failed. About seventy years ago he sold to Daniel McManus a part of this farm and bought of Charles Bickmore, the farm now occupied by his son Mr. John Perley. All north of the present road was then a dense forest. Mrs. Perley was a woman of great energy. She was a great horseback rider, and used to card, spin and weave cloth and carry to Belfast on horseback, and change for groceries. The road to Belfast then was simply a bridle path through dense forest. Once about seventy-nine years ago Mr. Ordway, Mr. Perley and his wife, each on horseback, followed the spotted trees to Belfast, Mrs. Perley carrying her baby (which baby was Bro. John

Perley, now a man of eighty) ; returning they were overtaken by a thunderstorm in the dense forest ; it was dark but a flash of lightning revealed a pile of boards left there in the winter. Mrs. Perley urged them to make a shelter of the boards, which they did, by standing them up around a tree, and had just time to get under shelter when the rain came down in torrents and continued to come nearly all night. I remember well of hearing Mrs. Perley tell of this incident, and she claimed that they had a very happy time—a prayer meeting, plenty of singing, and plenty of water for the baby. Several years after this camping in the woods, Mrs. Perley made a visit to her childhood home in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, and returned, a journey of over five hundred miles, all on horseback.

Three brothers, Frederick, John and Nathaniel Stevens, came from Gorham to Unity in 1802 or 1803, and settled on what is now the main road from Augusta to Bangor, where they cleared farms, raised families, and died at mature old ages, respected by all their acquaintances.

Richard Cornforth moved from Readfield to Unity in the year 1810, and the same year built the first wool-carding and cloth-dressing mill in town. He brought his machinery from Readfield, and it is said to have been the first carding machine ever used in the state, having been brought from England. The mill is now standing but in a dilapidated condition.

Among the early settlers of this town were Mr. Kelley, Mr. Elisha Parkhurst and Mr. Jonathan Hunt. Mr. Hunt settled on the farm now occupied by Samuel Rol-

lins, and raised a large family, I think the most of the children were boys. I remember one of the boys, Archelus by name (when I was quite a young boy, and he a man), who was a very bright, smart man, but somewhat eccentric, and very sarcastic when he bent his wits in that direction. He is said to have been the author of an acrostic commencing with the first letter of the alphabet and going through to z, and bringing in twenty-six names of men then living in town, which I learned when a boy of ten or twelve, and have a mind (at the risk of being called boyish) to repeat a few verses from this poem.

A is for Antioch, the city of fame,  
 B is for Burnham, for he bears a great name.  
 C is for Conner, the Colonel of place,  
 D is for Dinsmore, with his narrow face.  
 E is for Elijah Winslow, who courts Elize for a living,  
 F is for Fowler, who fell over Thanksgiving,  
 G is for George Sinclair, the driver of sheep,  
 H is for poor Hunt, for he can just creep.

As my memory will not serve me to repeat all of this poem, and as I presume it would not interest you as much as it did me when a boy of ten, I will proceed.

There have lived and died since my memory, John Melvin, Thomas Fowler, Jonathan Hunt, and James Packard, and perhaps others, who were soldiers in the Revolutionary war and drew pensions until their death. There were also quite a number of men in town who enlisted and saw more or less service in the war of 1812, among them Nathaniel Stevens, Robert Blanchard, Elisha Bither and Josiah Murch.

In the war of the Rebellion which commenced in 1861 and continued about four years, Unity promptly furnished her quota of men and the following named persons and possibly a few others, besides others that were hired as



substitutes in other towns, went into the army, nearly all of whom returned to Unity, and many of them now living in town.

Amander Rackliff was Capt. of a company ; Amander Rackliff, Jr., a drummer ; Marsian McManus was in Libby prison nine months, contracted disease while there and died a few years after the close of the war ; Daniel Small, 2d, was shot and killed in battle ; Phineas Bennett died soon after getting home ; Otis McGray wounded in battle ; Cyrus Haskell now in the Treas. department at Washington ; Cyrus Myrick killed in the army ; Jephtha Murch died soon after the close of the war ; Lemuel Reynolds died in hospital ; Alonzo Libby contracted disease while in the army, and died soon after the close of the war ; Daniel McManus, Daniel Small, Andrew A. Hurd, John Ranlett, Benjamin Woods, Thomas Cookson, Josiah Scribner, Daniel Scribner, Edwin Hall, Ruel Berry, Samuel Myrick, Daniel Starkey, John Crie, Amos Douglas, Frank Hamilton, Daniel Flye, Eli Chase, Elijah Flye, Charles O. Chase, Joseph Libby, William Hamilton, Warren Jones, Henry Robinson, Jonathan Kelley, Elbridge Parkman, John T. Main, M. D., Jefferson Clifford, Benjamin Williams, M. D., Eugene Boulter, Ralph Harmon, Asa Douglass, Alvano Lowell, William Bither, Fred Seavey, Rufus B. Bither, Edwin Moore, John Berry, William Moore, Nathan Libby, William Whitten, George Clifford, Edwin E. Stevens, Silas Bither, Lewis Thompson, Josiah K. Reynolds, Charles Marshall, Myrick Hagerty, Augustus Broad.

Over fifty years ago Mr. Thomas B. Hussey built a

small building on the Sandy stream, near where I now live, to be used for an iron foundry, where he made plow and other castings. He soon, however, erected other and larger buildings where he manufactured plows, cultivators and some other farming tools, quite extensively for many years, during which time his son, J. O. Hussey, carried on the business of manufacturing cooking stoves quite extensively for several years. The buildings and their contents were burned some eight or ten years ago, and have never been rebuilt.

About 1831 there was built in town, near Unity village, quite large tannery buildings. The buildings for tanning and for other purposes incident to the tanning business, covered nearly one-fourth of an acre of ground. A Mr. Larrabee superintended the erection of the buildings and ran the business for a short time, when he died, and Mr. Thomas Snell took his place and carried on the business for quite a number of years. They used a large amount of wood and bark, and distributed a large amount of money among the inhabitants of this and adjacent towns. The enterprise proving unsuccessful financially, was abandoned and the buildings went to decay, and finally the remains were burned. It is estimated that this tannery turned out from one hundred to one hundred and fifty tons of leather annually.

In 1874 or 1875 there was a company formed who built a building in Unity, near the village, and supplied it with the necessary fixtures for manufacturing cheese on quite an extensive scale. This enterprise also, for some cause or other, proved a financial failure, and after running



a few years, the business was settled, the apparatus sold and the building taken down.

The first church in town was built by the Methodist society about 1826, and stood near the town line, between Unity and Freedom, and not far from where Peter W. Ayer now lives, and was torn down several years ago. The next one was built by the Friends in 1828, which they have recently thoroughly repaired, and have a very neat and commodious house of worship, where meetings are held regularly twice a week. The next was built by the Congregationalist society in 1837, and sat near where Benjamin B. Stevens now lives, and after a few years was taken down and moved to the village, where it was occupied as a church several years and then torn down and used for other purposes. The next year there was built what was called the Union Church at the village, which, I think, is now occupied by the Methodist and Freewill Baptist societies alternately. So we have at the present time two churches in town. We have but ten school-houses in town, though we have twelve school districts.

We have two saw-mills, and a clothing factory. We have three grist-mills, one or more shingle-mills, and a corn canning factory, where there is a large business done in canning corn. This enterprise distributes a large sum of money among the citizens of Unity and adjoining towns, annually. About the early records of the town I will say but little. As they are somewhat monotonous and the people spoken of in those records have long since passed away, the town records of their time would not be interesting, especially to those of you who do not

reside in Unity. The first Plantation meeting (the town was then called Twenty-five Mile Pond Plantation), was held at Lemuel Bartlett's dwelling house, in the month of May, 1803, at which meeting the following officers were chosen: Joseph Carter, Moderator; Abner Knowles, Clerk (Dr. Knowles served as town clerk about thirty years in succession); Daniel Whitmore, and Frederick Stevens, Assessors; Lemuel Bartlett, John Perley and Nathan Parkhurst, Selectmen; Isaac Mitchell, Collector, at seven cents on the dollar, and Benjamin Bartlett, Treasurer. At this meeting it was voted to raise one hundred dollars to defray necessary charges for the past year and the present, which have or may accrue in the Plantation.

The town was incorporated in 1804. Notwithstanding all the hardships and deprivations of the early settlers of this and other rural towns, it seemed to be almost the universal opinion of those early pioneers, that the people living in those early days enjoyed as much and even more of life, than those of the present time. You will allow me to say, however, that in my judgment with our present facilities and with our present views we would decidedly prefer our present surroundings and conditions to theirs. And you will allow me to say in conclusion that in my judgment, the people of Unity, as a whole compared with other rural towns, are a frugal, industrious and rather moral people.

Thanking you for your kindness and patience in listening to this imperfect sketch, I leave the subject, hoping that if a history of the town of Unity is ever written, it will be by a younger and smarter man.