

SETTLING THE DISTRICT CALLED FRANKFORT

by Gordon E. Kershaw

The Plymouth Company, a speculative land company of ancient lineage in New England, was reactivated in 1749 as the Kennebeck Purchase Company by an enterprising group of Boston merchants. These entrepreneurs, replete with ambitious schemes for exploiting their vast holdings, were able to create the first in a series of proprietary townships which grew up along the Kennebec River in Maine. Within two short years of inception of Company operations, the new town, then called Frankfort, later Dresden, had become the pulse center of early Kennebeck Purchase expansion. Events leading to the settlement of this town are important for the light they shed on the transactions of an unusually innovative and achieving land company and on the way in which other eighteenth century New England towns were developed.

The origins of the Kennebeck Purchase Company can be traced to the debt-ridden Plymouth colony which successfully petitioned in 1629 for a grant of "any Convenient place either of Trading or Fishing whereby that Plantation [might] Subsist" (1) on the Kennebec River in Maine. A generous land grant of the Council of New England to the Plymouth, Massachusetts Pilgrims was made out to Governor William Bradford and his associates. Although it was certain enough that this grant should extend for the "Space of fifteen English Miles on each side" (2) of the Kennebec, the coastal and northern limits conflicted with grants conferred upon other groups, those conflicts leading to lawsuits which continued for many years. The Pilgrims managed a profitable fur trading post near the site of present-day Augusta until about 1640, after which time the territory seemed of little value. (3) Therefore, in 1661 the Plymouth leaders sold their interests for £ 400 to Antipas Boyes, John Winslow, Edward Tyng, and Thomas Brattle, Massachusetts merchants who were the founders of the new Kennebeck Purchase Company. Because of the Indian menace, it was not until 1749 that the heirs of these merchants considered substantial further development of the Maine tract. The lure of the Kennebec for the Pilgrims had been priceless furs. For the Kennebeck proprietors, it was the opportunity for remunerative land speculation and the quick profits to be derived from stripping rich timber lands.

It was essential that a settlement be commenced on the river without delay to provide a standard to be followed in later proprietary enterprises and to demonstrate to rival land companies that the Kennebeck Purchase Company was determined

to enforce its claims. The Kennebeck proprietors, a body of Boston merchants which included such prominent names as Bowdoin, Hancock, Apthorp, Tyng, Pitts, Temple, and Gardiner was flush with money recently earned during King George's War from privateering, trade, or war contracts. These Boston merchants furnished dynamic leadership in settling the area chosen for the site of Frankfort.

The proprietors proposed a location for the new town which possessed the advantages of good soil, a stand of timber, proximity to existing towns near the coast, and excellent transportation afforded by its position at the juncture of the Kennebec and Eastern Rivers. Before developing the land, the Company had to acquaint scattered earlier settlers with its objectives and to legalize its relationship with them. Samuel Goodwin, official agent in Maine, was empowered "to prevent all trespassing within their [Company's] Limmits." (4) On September 5, 1751, a special committee consisting of William Brattle, Robert Temple, William Bowdoin, David Jeffries, and Thomas Marshall was created "to treat with the present settlers..." (5) who were living in towns already established around the mouth of the Kennebec by the proprietors of the rival Pejepscot Company. These early inhabitants were alarmed at the intrusion, but they stood to gain, for the Committee was directed to "Lay Out and Run the Bounds of...New Castle, Wichcassett [Wiscasset], Townsend, Harrington, Topsham, Brunswick and Georgetown and to petition the General Court to Incorporate these Several Settlements into Distinct Towns." (6) The Kennebeck proprietors promised these people that they would not be molested in their present holdings and that six acres would be set aside for a meeting house and common in each town. The Company would also donate two hundred acres to the town for the first settled minister and his heirs. (7)

The settlers themselves might easily obtain legal possession of their lands by making application for quit claim deeds from the Kennebeck Company within a nine month time limit. Their sole expense would be the cost of their deeds. It is a matter of record, however, that at least fifteen farmers in the Georgetown area held out for several years before bowing to the power of the Company. When they did acquiesce, they were assessed not only the cost of the deed but also a sum which varied according to the size of their land holdings. Instances of penalties are those of Shubael Hinckley, who owned 317 acres and paid £ 63.8 (8) and Silvanus Coomes and Stephen Andrews, joint owners of 212 acres who forfeited £ 53.6.8 (9). Such assessments were a stern warning to other delinquent settlers.

Concurrent with the "quieting" of squatters' claims was the equally important matter of surveying Company lands. Samuel Goodwin, as agent and clerk, was chosen to supervise the process, and £ 270 was voted to meet immediate expenses. (10) The actual surveying was entrusted to Lieutenant John North who was retained by the Company first to survey certain "Islands and Lands..." (11) and as settlement advanced northward, to chart the upper reaches of the Kennebec.

After completing initial surveying, the proprietors focused attention on coming to terms with the local Indians who, while not numerous, were enough of a threat to discourage white expansion into the area. These Indians, Norridgewocks, as they were best known, were always alert to invasion of their territory and were quick to complain to the Massachusetts General Court when existing treaties were violated. Settlers in the area were protected from them by the defenses of a Company fort erected at the new town of Frankfort and by Fort Richmond (12) located a few miles to the south.

On September 29th, 1753, shortly after the settlement of Frankfort had been commenced, Fort Richmond became the scene of the signing of a treaty with the Indians. The Massachusetts representatives included William Skinner, a Pejepscot proprietor, and Jacob Wendell, James Bowdoin, William Brattle, and Samuel Goodwin, Kennebeck Purchase Company proprietors. (13) The Massachusetts officials assured Indian spokesmen that white settlement would not proceed further up the Kennebec River than Richmond. In fact, however, the Kennebeck proprietors had already constructed their new Fort Frankfort well above it. The next year the Treaty of 1753 would again be broken by the establishment of Forts Western and Halifax on the upper river.

The new treaty strengthened the position of the proprietors in their endeavours at Frankfort, then being settled. This town had been authorized by the proprietors of the Kennebeck Purchase on April 23, 1750, when they moved:

...that the First of the two Towns formerly voted to be laid out on Each Side of Kennebeck River shall be laid out on the East Side Opposit to Richmond Fort in the following Manner Vizt - for each Settler twenty Acres between the Main River and the Eastern River and the other Eighty Acres to be Contiguous Either on the East Side of the Eastern River to the Westward of the Twenty Acre Lotts as shall be Determined by the Proprietees hereafter... (14)

The town, situated some twenty miles from the mouth of the river and north of such earlier towns as Wiscasset and Georgetown, ran for five miles along the Kennebec and extended back from the river for fifteen miles. (15)

In those troubled times only the presence of some kind of defense in addition to that provided by nearby Fort Richmond would persuade settlers to venture to the town in any significant numbers. The proprietors, therefore, drew up plans for the erection of a "Defencable House of 400 feet square for the Greater Security of the Settlers." (16) The structure as it was first planned in early 1752, a year prior to the signing of the treaty with the Indians, seemed to be merely a palisade for the shelter of the first arrivals. Later it boasted a barracks, two blockhouses, several smaller buildings, and a number of cannon. (17) This Fort Frankfort, later named Fort Shirley to compliment the royal governor, was so strong that it was never subjected to direct attack by the Norridgewocks. The Indians largely limited their actions to constant complaints to the General Court about the violation of their treaty. Kennebeck proprietors were ordered by the Court to "quiet" the Indians, so the Company voted to direct Agent Goodwin and Captain Lithgow of Richmond Fort to procure a quit claim deed from the Norridgewocks, for which they were authorized to pay up to £ 50. (18) It is not clear whether this action succeeded, but in any event, by July of 1753 relations with the local Indians had been so well regularized that Samuel Goodwin received a barrel of rum from the proprietors and instructions to "treat the Indians that go to Frankfort, to make them easy." (19)

Meanwhile Company officials considered ways of encouraging settlement in the projected town. Two possible courses to attract settlers to Frankfort were [1] to induce some continental magnate to furnish transportation to America in return for a princely land grant and [2] to encourage some of the Company proprietors to invest in the new land in the same way. Several precedents existed in New England for the taking of such risks by proprietors. In the early 1720's Robert Temple, as a Pejepscot proprietor, negotiated for the planting of some one hundred Scotch-Irish families on the lower Kennebec and Androscoggin Rivers near the present-day towns of Brunswick, Bath, and Topsham. (20) These settlements were later broken up by Indian attacks. In the 1740's Samuel Waldo settled some German families at Waldoborough in a similar manner and was successful. (21) James Bowdoin, a Kennebeck Purchase proprietor, suggested to the Province that it, itself, encourage settlement. In 1748 he presented the General Court

with an original pamphlet entitled: "Some Thoughts on the Importation of Foreigners," in which "most eloquently he urged a bounty on immigrants as the best means of developing the economic potential of the Province." (22) Deciding to sponsor German immigration, the proprietors entered into correspondence with John Stedman of Rotterdam and Henry Ehrenfield Luther of Frankfort who were, presumably, to be middlemen in the arrangements and with Joseph Crellius of Pennsylvania who was to act as immigration agent. Crellius was experienced, for he had previously served Waldo in a similar capacity. (23) Late in 1751, these agents successfully brought the first foreign settlers to the new townsite on the Kennebec, this in spite of competition from other agents bent on sending immigrants to Nova Scotia. (24)

Stedman of Rotterdam fitted out the English ship *Priscilla* which carried the group to America, and Crellius accompanied the voyagers on their dangerous journey. Back in Frankfort, Luther fought hard against the propaganda of rival agents by publishing his own glowing accounts of the opportunities waiting in Massachusetts Bay. (25) By November 14, 1751, the *Priscilla* had arrived in Boston harbor and its passengers were eager to proceed to the Kennebec.

Shortly afterward, the Kennebeck proprietors at a meeting in Boston made provision for the new arrivals:

Whereas a Number of German Protestants are Lately arrived from Germany - Voted that Such of them as Will Settle in the Township aforesaid have Granted them One Hundred Acres to Settle on upon the Conditions that shall be proposed by Doct. Silvester Gardiner, Maj. Nathaniel Thwing, Mr. Willm Bowdoin - a Committee appointed for that Purpose & thereupon that this Propriettee Supply them with Provisions to the first of June next they giving their Bonds to Pay the Sums Respectively advanced them in twelve Months after their departure from Boston... (26)

At their next meeting the proprietors voted that the new town should be called Frankfort (27), probably not so much a reference to the origin of the new settlers as a tribute to Henry Ehrenfield Luther, Chancellor of State at Frankfort in Germany - the man who had done the most to bring them to America. (28)

By the middle of December the proprietors learned that the first twenty prospective settlers were ready to leave for the Kennebec, (29) and moved that they were to be transported there by water. At this time of year, the inexperienced

foreigners would be able to do little more than begin to clear the land; but at least, the proprietors reasoned, it would be easier for them to cart logs for a stockade across the snow than through the mires in springtime.

Agent Samuel Goodwin was already on the scene when the new citizens arrived. He was soon to be joined by Nathaniel Thwing, Samuel Fowle, and John Tufts, all small shareholders of relatively little importance who had chosen to settle permanently on the new lands. These four men were to cooperate with the townspeople in the construction of a sawmill, to furnish provisions, and to supervise work on the palisade.

(30) Great proprietors would also keep an eye on affairs. In January, 1752, Doctor Gardiner, William Bowdoin, and Gershom Flagg were appointed to form a group which would swell to become a "Committee of Ten" and include nearly all of the large shareholders. Of these, Doctor Gardiner was to prove the strongest moving force of a committee charged to "Settle and Regulate the Town of Frankfort." (31)

Thus the Frankfort settlement was launched. The "Foreign Protestants" were struggling to survive, so their stake in the wilderness more than equalled that of the Kennebeck proprietors. It was long assumed that these wanderers were German, and indeed they had left Germany to find a new homeland, but it has been conclusively demonstrated that they were really of French Huguenot extraction. (32) Certainly their names - names such as Goud, Pechin, Malbon, Pouchard, Rittal, Houdelette, and Bugnon - suggest this. Since in 1752 to people of British America the word "Frenchman" implied the Pope, Romanism, and the enemy, it was easier for all concerned to think of the immigrants as "Germans." As Germans they consistently appear in Company records.

Other immigrants were soon to arrive on the Kennebec. The Huguenots were joined by friends and family connections. Their numbers were also increased by people of undoubtedly Anglo-Saxon descent, men such as Joseph McFarland, William Mitchell, Samuel Turner, Abraham Wyman, Jonathan Rand, Jr., and Uriah Kendall, each of whom received as was now customary the one hundred acre plot granted to earlier arrivals. (33) Some German planters also appeared, including Wolf Rupert, and Philip, George, John, and Cassimir Mayer. A common bond among all of these Frankfort settlers was their Protestant background.

The proprietors had not yet taken their own shares of Frankfort lands. They had planned a general first division of Company lands among themselves to occur as early as February 3rd, 1753 (34), but the division did not go forward

as scheduled. It did not take place until January 7th, 1756, when the Indian danger had been largely removed and the Company holdings were beginning to increase in value. At this time twenty-four 3200 acre lots were laid out, and each full shareholder received a full lot. (35) This was just the beginning of a program of distribution of Kennebeck Company lands which was to continue for a half century.

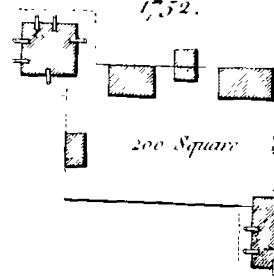
Although proprietary land allotment had been postponed for a time, the shareholders began to see an opportunity for individual profit. Their outlay in settling Frankfort had been heavy, and they wished some immediate return on their past expenditures and on those still ahead. Sterling was scarce, but since most of the Company members were merchants, the assessments necessary for land development could be paid in kind. The proprietors could draw upon their own equipment and supplies for profit. For instance, Doctor Gardiner, chairman of the Committee of Ten, volunteered to supply a sloop to furnish transportation between Boston and Frankfort on the Kennebec, for which he received "400 Acres of Land up Sheepscutt River..." (36) He was also entrusted with the management of supplies for dependent Huguenot settlers during their first year at Frankfort. To cover the vast expense involved, the Committee of Ten dutifully gave their bond of £ 3000 in January of 1752. (37) The long list of necessities, marvellous in its completeness, which the Doctor furnished for the settlers, however, came almost exclusively from the stores and warehouses of Kennebeck proprietors. Thus early stock ownership in the Kennebeck Purchase Company must be viewed both as a source of expense and profit with the prospects of real riches through land development still well in the future.

By 1754, the Kennebeck proprietors felt confident enough to circulate in Massachusetts a roseate broadside which publicized, and perhaps exaggerated, their achievements and expanded upon the opportunities still available to new settlers:

...at the said Town of Frankfort, there is a Saw-Mill & a Grist-Mill erected, and about Forty Families settled, who notwithstanding they went there so lately as in the Spring of 1752, have been able the past Year to raise nearly a Sufficiency of every Thing to maintain themselves; and this present Year will stand in need of no Assistance... And besides the Advantage of a rich Soil, [the town] is situated on a fine, Navigable River, which has furnished the said Settlers with a Market for their Wood, by the Sale of which they have been paid considerable for their Labour in clearing the Land... (38)

(Continued on Page 82)

Frankfort
built by the Plymouth Company.
1752.



Explanation.

The Surveye referred to in the Title are 1. the Lands betwixt on the Packed lines, extending to 15 miles on each side of Kennebek River, from Van Kalls to Pennington Point on the South, to the Letters A & B Northwards, Surveyed 1750 by John North Esq.

2. Rest of the Sea Coast by Capt. Hazzen 1750.

3. River Sagadahok or Amorellaggin, & its communication with the Kennebek, by Col. Jos. Heath Capt. of Rich mond Fort 1719.

4. R. Kennebek from Richmond F. to the Carrying place & Pond, with the Plans of 3 Forts, by Eph. Jenox, pursuant to Gov. Shirleys order 1754.

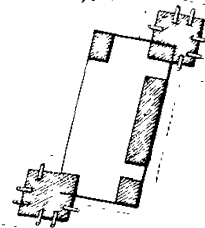
5. The Heads of the River Kennebek & La Chaudiere, with the Course of the latter, by a French dweller 1754.

6. Fort Frederick at Crown Point from a Map of Champlain Lake & Montreal, taken from a French Officer.

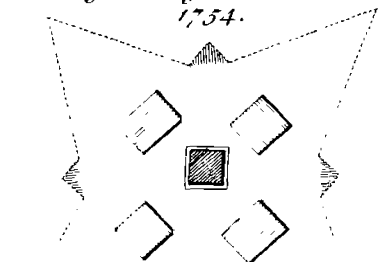
The double Packed lines are Carrying Places, where the Indians cross over.

The Single Packed Lines are the bounds of the Grant to the late Company of New Plymouth.

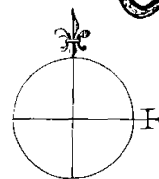
Fort Western, built by the
Plymouth Company.
1754.



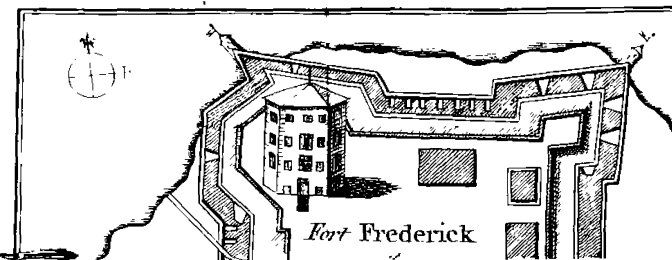
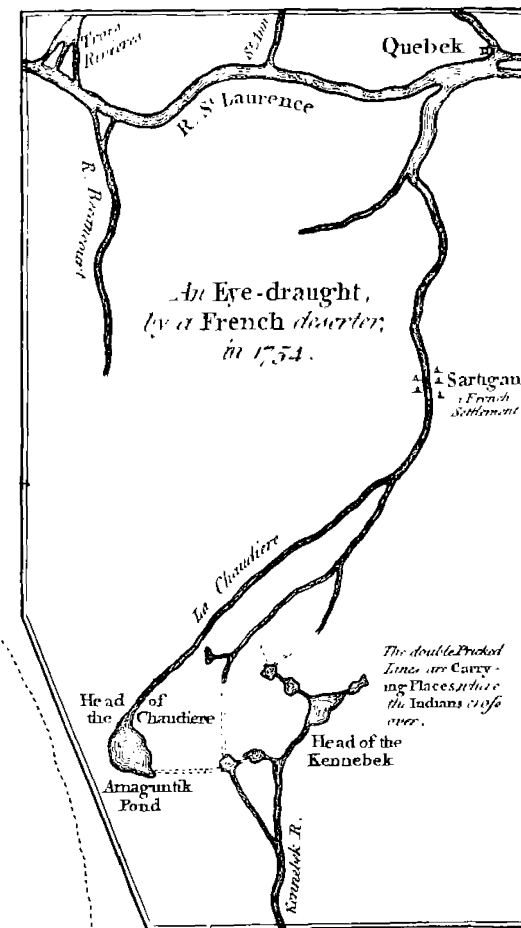
Fort Halifax,
built by the Government
of the Massachusetts
1754.

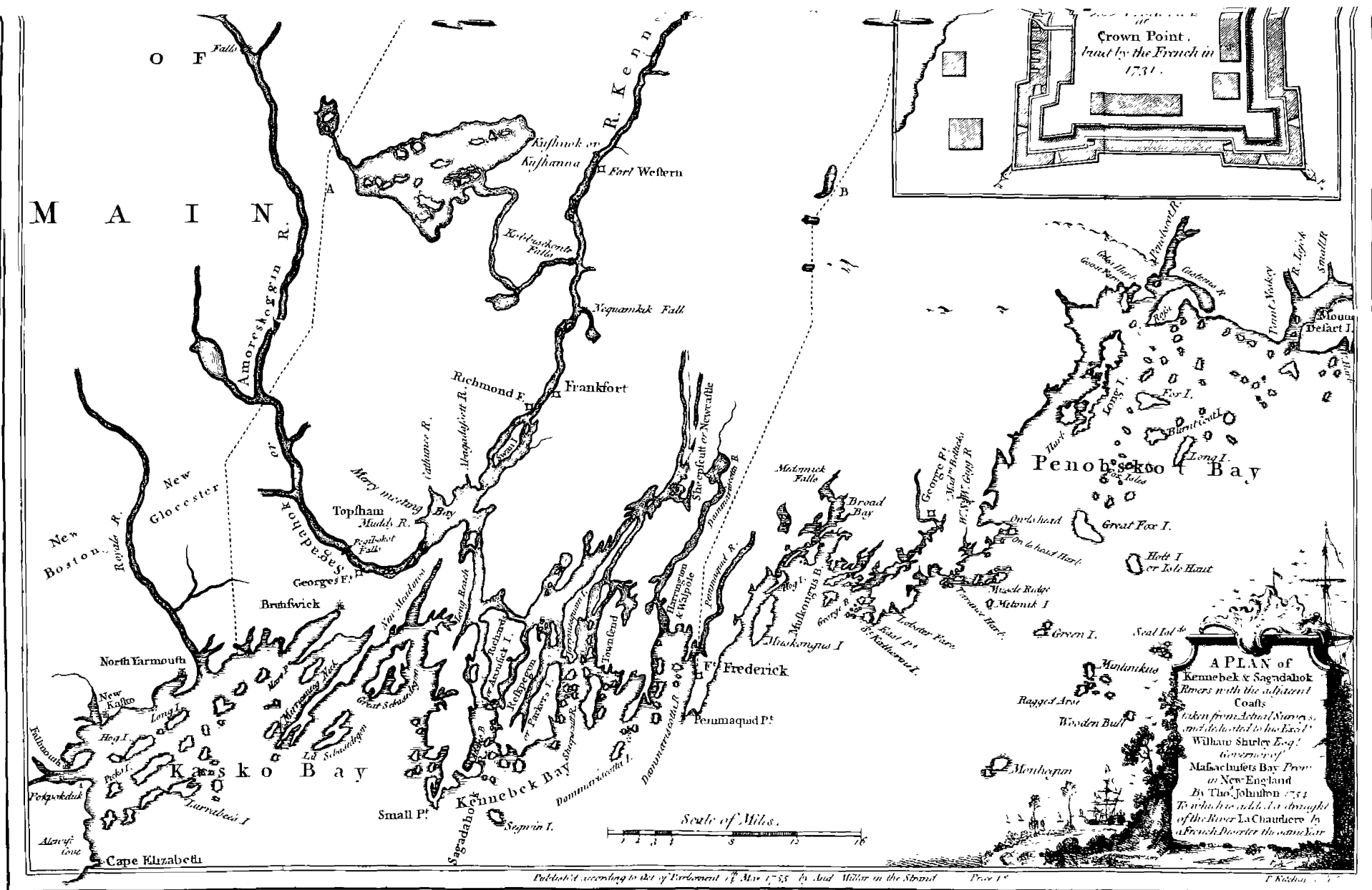


P R O V I N C E



This Plan is laid down by the Camps, without regard to the Variation which may be about 11 deg. West Small Point.





Although some lesser problems of development were yet to be resolved, the hazards faced by the proprietors in erecting a new town on the edge of the wilderness had been substantially overcome. Members of the Kennebec Purchase Company could look forward to a promising future in their campaign for mastery of the upper valley.

-----NOTES-----

1. Grant from Council of Plymouth to William Bradford and Associates, 1629, Farnham Papers (Maine Historical Society, *Documentary History of the State of Maine* [Portland, Me., 1901]), VII, 108-116.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants in the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1955), 24.
4. Resolution, Oct. 31, 1750, Kennebeck Purchase Papers, Records, I, 52, Maine Historical Society, Portland, Me., hereafter cited as K.P.P.
5. Resolution, Sept. 5, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 93.
6. Third Warrant, July 6, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 83-88.
7. Resolution, May 8, 1751, K.P.P., Records I, 66. Provisions for a meeting house, ministerial lot, and common lands were standard features of colonial township development.
8. Confirmation of Grant, Oct. 10, 1759, K.P.P., Records, II, 210-211.
9. Confirmation of Grant, July 13, 1759, K.P.P., Records, II, 202-204.
10. Resolution, Oct. 31, 1750, K.P.P., Records, I, 49.
11. Resolution, Sept. 5, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 90. Lt. John North, then stationed at Ft. Richmond, acted as Company surveyor for many years.
12. Charles Allen, *History of Dresden, Maine* (Copyright by Bertram E. Packard, 1931), 78-79.
13. *Ibid.*, 88. The conference was headed by Sir William Pepperrell, representing Gov. Shirley. Of the four Kennebeck proprietors, Wendell and Brattle were full shareholders, Bowdoin owned a double share, and Goodwin was a partial shareholder. Both Wendell and Brattle had liquidated their interests in the Company by 1757.
14. Resolution, Dec. 6, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 102. During this period in N.E. 100 acres was the usual settler grant.
15. Resolution, Aug. 14, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 72. The average N.E. township was much smaller; usually only 5 x 5 miles.
16. Resolution, Dec. 6, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 102. As constructed, the fort was only 200 feet on a side.

17. Thomas Johnston, *A Plan of Kennebeck and Sagadahock Rivers with the adjacent Coasts* [engraved map] (London, 1755). A rare copy is owned by the Me. Hist. Soc., reproduced on pages 80-81.
18. Resolution, Nov. 7, 1753, K.P.P., Records, II, 47.
19. Resolution, July 30, 1753, K.P.P., Records, II, 35.
20. Temple Prime, *Some Account of the Temple Family*, 2nd. ed. (New York, 1894), 34.
21. Roy Akagi, *The Town Proprietors of the New England Colonies* (Philadelphia, 1924), 258-268.
22. Shipton et al., *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, XI, 515.
23. Akagi, *Town Proprietors*, 265.
24. Allen, *Dresden*, 127. K.P.P., Records, I, 152.
25. Allen, *Ibid.*, 133. Luther's rivals in recruiting had attempted to discredit him by printing articles referring to the slowness of his ships and the backwardness of the Province.
26. Resolution, Dec. 6, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 103.
27. Resolution, Dec. 11, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 104.
28. Allen, *Dresden*, 51.
29. Resolution, Dec. 13, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 105-106.
30. Resolution, Dec. 18, 1751, K.P.P., Records, I, 108.
31. Resolution, Jan. 17, 1752, K.P.P., Records, I, 120.
32. Allen, *Dresden*, 125-127. Allen shows that the early settlers at Frankfort were indeed Huguenots by tracing their places of origin in French provinces and baptismal records.
33. Confirmation of Grants, Jan. 24, 1753, K.P.P., Records, II, 2.
34. "Shares of Proprietors in 1753, 1756, & 1757," K.P.P., Misc. Records, small booklet, 6.
35. *Ibid.*
36. "An Account of Dr. S. Gardiner's Holdings in the Kennebeck Purchase to 22 Feb., 1768," K.P.P., Loose Papers (1760-1790).
37. "An Acct. of Sundrys Wanted to Carry Down to Franckfort in Kennebeck River," K.P.P., Loose Papers (1690-1753).
38. Broadside advertisement, Jan. 2, 1754, K.P.P., Printed Papers.

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