

-The Wolfborough Road- Hanover's Link to its Colonial Past

Historical Notes and Time Line

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1622: Sir Ferdinando Gorges and Captain Robert Mason (former Governor of Newfoundland) received a land grant from the Council for New England that extended from the mouth of the Merrimack River to the mouth of the Kennebec River. They called the land grant *Laconia*.

1629: That land grant was split at the mouth of the Piscataqua River – Gorges retained the land to the north that became Maine, and Mason retained the land to the south that became New Hampshire. Mason named the territory *New Hampshire* after the county in southern England where he was originally from.

1635: Captain John Mason dies; and from 1641 until 1679 New Hampshire was under the protection and control of the Massachusetts Bay Colony situated immediately south.

1642: Beginning of the English Civil war.

1675: Beginning of King Philip's war – lasted until 1677.

1679: King Charles II made New Hampshire a separate province.

1686: New Hampshire was part of the Dominion of New England, until that collapsed in 1689.

1689: The beginning of King William's War (War of the League of Augsburg). Lasts until 1697.

1691: William and Mary issued a new provincial charter for New Hampshire; and the re-establishment of royal government in New Hampshire.

1699: New Hampshire was back under the rule of Massachusetts until 1741, and shared a governor with that colony.

1702: Beginning of Queen Anne's War (War of the Spanish Succession). Lasts until 1713.

1740: Beginning of King George's War (War of the Austrian Succession). Lasts until 1748.

1740: Settlement of Township Number 4 on the Connecticut River (later named Charlestown).

1741: King George II (1683 – 1760) appointed Benning Wentworth (1696 – 1770) the Royal Governor solely of New Hampshire. William Wentworth immigrated to Boston from Alford in Lincolnshire in 1637, and soon moved up the coast to the Exeter / Portsmouth area of New Hampshire. The Wentworth Family prospered and in politics and mercantile pursuits in Portsmouth.



1741: King George II settles the long running boundary dispute between Massachusetts and New Hampshire (the boundary between NH and present day Maine and the boundary between NH and Massachusetts). Not established was NH's westerly boundary with New York.

1752: Settlement of Walpole by Benjamin Bellows.

1755: The beginning of the "French and Indian War" (the Seven Year's War). The war lasts until 1763.

1759: In September British Major General James Wolfe is killed in the Battle of Quebec on the Plains of Abraham that brought about the defeat of the French in North America.

1759: On October 5, 1759 Governor Benning Wentworth charts the Town of Wolfeboro, which he named in honor of the fallen hero General James Wolfe.

1761: Governor of NH Benning Wentworth decides to open the upper region of the Connecticut River valley for settlement; and that March sends out a surveying team to layout new townships north of Charlestown, up to the mouth of the Ammonoosuc River.

1761: On July 4th, Governor Wentworth charts the first towns within the upper Connecticut River valley: Hanover, Norwich, Hartford, Lebanon, and Enfield.

1764: July 20th, King George III declares all of the land west of the Connecticut River is in fact part of New York, not New Hampshire. By this time NH Governor Wentworth has already chartered 138 new towns west of the Connecticut River in what is now the State of Vermont.

1765: The first permanent settler in Hanover, Edmund Freeman III, spends the winter instead of returning to Connecticut.

1766: King George III (1738 – 1820) removed Governor Benning Wentworth from office, and appointed his nephew John Wentworth II as the new Royal Governor of New Hampshire and Surveyor General of the King's Woods in North America.

1769: Governor John Wentworth began construction of a new country estate for himself in Wolfeboro on Smith's Pond.

1769: On December 13th Rev. Dr. Eleazar Wheelock of Lebanon, Connecticut, after working with Governor John Wentworth, secured a charter from King George III for a new college to be located in New Hampshire. Wentworth, as Royal Governor, was to be on the Board of Trustees of the new college.

1770: In August, after selecting Hanover as the site for his new college in July, Wheelock arrives on the Hanover Plain – a dense wilderness. Hanover has about twenty-five families living within the town - the nearest one about 2 ½ miles from the site of the new college. It is 175 miles down the Connecticut River to Wheelock's former home in the town of Lebanon, Connecticut.

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Governor John Wentworth, Dartmouth College, and the Wolfeboro Road

Rev. Dr. Eleazar Wheelock, the founder of Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, first visited Hanover in early June 1770 to consider the vast wilderness landscape that is now the urban area of the town as a possible site for his new college. Other locations at Orford, Haverhill, and Landaff were also considered, and were subsequently looked at by the 59 year old Wheelock and his party of trusted advisors later in June. On July 5, 1770, in Portsmouth, New Hampshire at the home of his friend and confidant John Wentworth II, then the Royal Governor of the Colony of New Hampshire, Wheelock announced that Hanover was to be the location of his new school, situated on 1,700 acres of land that was being gifted to Wheelock and Dartmouth College by both Governor Wentworth and the Proprietors of the Town of Hanover.

In late August 1770, Wheelock permanently returned to Hanover from his former home in Lebanon, Connecticut, 175 miles to the south, along with several family members, his personal physician, laborers, a handful of young students, and teams of oxen to begin the arduous task of establishing Dartmouth College within the dense virgin forest that blanketed the entire region. At that time, there were only about 30 adult males that had also emigrated from lower Connecticut and settled within the entire town, making for about 25 families. And whatever settlement that was by then taking place was several miles at the closest, well north and east of where the College was locating down in the southwest corner of the Township. Other than this first bit of scattered individual settlement, there were not yet any village areas within the town, although both saw and grist mills had been constructed and placed in operation a year earlier in an area of town that would years later come to be known as "Mill Village,, and today is known as Etna. The only road by then opened up was the so-called "half-mile road" that today is the northerly section of Lyme Road, and at its closest point was more than a mile distant from where the College was locating.

John Wentworth II (1737 – 1820) served as Royal Governor of New Hampshire from 1766, when he was appointed by King George III to replace his infamous uncle Benning Wentworth, until the summer of 1775, when the outbreak of the American Revolution forced him to flee North America. He was a man of culture and refined background, a graduate of Harvard in 1755 where he then continued his studies and three years later obtained his master's degree. One of his closest friends from his college days was a young Boston lawyer named John Adams; however, that friendship would become tragically shattered by the events of the American Revolution. As Governor of New Hampshire, he cared deeply about the overall welfare of the colony, and especially about education. As a result, and despite some major differences in religion and background, Wentworth worked closely with Wheelock in not only drafting the charter for Dartmouth College, but getting its approval from King George III. As the College became established upon the "Hanover Plain," not only was Wentworth a trustee of the new institution, but he and Wheelock corresponded frequently as Wentworth offered great support to Wheelock's unfolding endeavors and great interest in the school's progress as well.

Dr. Wheelock and his new school quickly took root in Hanover, and on Wednesday, August 28, 1771, the first commencement was held with Governor Wentworth and a party of about sixty guests, including Trustees, in attendance. Four students received degrees; for the Governor, this was his first visit to Hanover. Little more than the crudest of trails linked the Connecticut River valley with the easterly interior and coastal areas of New Hampshire. As a result, it took several days or more for the Governor and his party to reach Hanover, coming by way of Wolfeborough and Haverhill, and camping out at night. That same year, in 1771, Wentworth had constructed for himself a summerhouse or "plantation" in Wolfeborough, as it was then first spelled, partially in an effort to spur development in the town first chartered by his uncle in 1759. Benning Wentworth, like much of English North America, was deeply appreciative of the efforts of the great British General James Wolfe who, although killed in battle, had taken the city of Quebec from the French in September of 1759, successfully bringing the so-called French and Indian Wars to an end in Great Britain's favor.

It seems that John Wentworth enjoyed spending time away from the busy royal capitol of Portsmouth and relaxing beside the cool and calming waters of Lake Winnepesaukee. Here he could enjoy hunting and fishing if he was so inclined, as well as reading and writing, not to mention being closer to one of his favorite projects – Dartmouth College. The first mention by the Governor of any kind of a road to connect Hanover with the Lakes region of New Hampshire appears in a letter from Wentworth to Wheelock dated September 7, 1770, where he writes:

“Mr. House informs me of a good road to be made from Hanover to Winnipisioket Pond, in 35 miles, and I have required the representative proprietors of the soil forthwith to clear and make it convenient; which being done will, I hope convince by fact the inhabitants of this Province that the situation of Dartmouth College is not injurious to the trade and Govt. of New Hampshire, which suspicion is now the only foundation of all the calumny, invective, and aversion to it.”

John House was not only one of the original proprietors of the Town of Hanover in 1761, but was also one of the earlier settlers who located in Hanover adjacent to the Connecticut River and present day Lyme Road – on an area of land between the two latter day Fullington farms. Wentworth concludes his letter to Wheelock by saying that:

“It would much delight me to come to Hanover at the Corporation meeting; if possible I will, and bring the other Trustees.”

By Corporation meeting Wentworth was referring to commencement and the annual meeting of the Board of Trustees, of which, as per the College’s charter, he as Governor was a member trustee.

As mentioned above, the first road laid out in Hanover was in 1764 and is now the northerly section of present day Lyme Road. Soon, other roads were beginning to be laid out but some were not recorded, as a result much of the history of some of the first roads in Hanover is a bit murky. Nonetheless, roads linking up the mills located within the south central area of the town, with the College as well as with areas of settlement to the north towards Lyme, and to Lebanon and “Enfield Pond” to the south and east soon began to appear by early to mid-1770.

The location of the College within the Town of Hanover and its immediate presence and success within the area provided great stimulus to early efforts at road building. At a public meeting held on July 30, 1770, it was voted to lay out a road from Hanover to Wolfeborough; and a committee was appointed consisting of John Ordway, Jonathan Freeman, Nathaniel Wright, John House, and John Wright. It was this action by the town that Wentworth refers to in his letter to Wheelock of September 7th.

Furthermore, the committee was instructed to:

“...run a line from near the southwest corner of Hanover to the Great Pond, or Governor’s seat, at Wolfeborough, and view the situation of the land and convenience for a highway, and make return the first Monday in October next.”

It was agreed that the members of the committee would be compensated for their efforts in the amount of four shillings and sixpence per day; and as surveyor, Jonathan Freeman was to receive six shillings and sixpence per day. It was also agreed that any of the committee members could appoint substitutes if they so desired. The committee promptly moved forward with the task at hand, spending ten days upon the survey of the new road; and reported to a meeting held on October 1st. At that meeting, it was affirmatively voted to lay out the road from the College to the Canaan town line; and a tax of six shillings was imposed for that purpose, to be paid by December 25th, or to be worked out by October 1st next ensuing.

During the months immediately following the action taken by Hanover’s voters in October 1770, the matter of the Wolfeborough Road was held in suspense while the New Hampshire Legislature, at the instance of the Governor, intervened with an Act that was passed on April 13, 1771, for

“...establishing and making passible a road from the Governor’s House in Wolfeborough, to Dartmouth College in Hanover.”

The Act went on to state:

“...the making of a road to Dartmouth College will greatly promote the design of that valuable institution,”

And, the Act then proceeded to enact the opening of a new road three rods wide to Plymouth,

“...and from thence on the straightest and best course to Dartmouth College in Hannover.”

John House, Jonathan Freeman, and David Hobart were appointed to lay out this section of the new road, and to make a plan of it, at the expense of the Province of New Hampshire, that was not to exceed twenty-five dollars. As to the proprietors of land within the respective towns, they were required forthwith to cause the same to be made passible, at the cost to those towns, by an equal tax levied equally upon all land within the town with the exception of lands laid out for public use. Should the proprietors of said town neglect to attend to this matter for a period of six months after the Legislature’s proclamation, the Governor was then authorized to appoint someone to do the work at the expense of the delinquent town.

A meeting of the Hanover proprietors was held November 7, 1771 to further the construction of the proposed road. At that meeting, it was voted levee a tax of 120 pounds to:

“...make the road from Dartmouth College to Canaan, to be laid agreeably to the Act of the Assembly for that purpose, to be paid by the 1st day of June next...”

The tax was to be an assessment on land, and to be made by David Mason and Jonathan Freeman, and collected by Isa Bridgman. This was something new for the Hanover proprietors, because prior to this all taxes to support development and improvements within the town had been assessed upon only the rights in gross of each proprietor. Instead, this was a tax assessed on the lands held by each proprietor at the rate of a penny and a half per acre. Apparently folks were not prompt at paying this new tax based upon the long list of delinquent tax payers published in the New Hampshire Gazette by Mr. Bridgman in July 1772, and the advertisement of land to be sold at his dwelling - house on August 24th for non-payment of the tax! Regardless, Lieut. John Ordway, Lieut. David Woodward, and Mr. John Wright were chosen as a committee to work with land owners over whose property the road was to pass and to see it constructed at a cost not exceeding 115 pounds. Additional monies were appropriated such that Timothy Smith and John House could be compensated for the construction of a bridge over Camp Brook at a cost of one pound and ten shillings.

Hanover and the adjacent towns thru which the so-called Wolfeborough Road passed must have completed their work on the new highway in quick order, for it is recorded that at the second Dartmouth College commencement exercises held on August 26, 1772 Governor John Wentworth arrived in Hanover with a considerable following after having traveled over the “new State road from Wolfeborough.” In a letter to Wheelock dated about a week earlier on August 17th, the Governor stated that:

“At Plymouth we shall make due enquiry, & if tolerably practical prefer the College road laid out by authority.”

Two students graduated on the 26th, and the trustees held their annual meeting. Wentworth must have been pleased with his second visit to the new college. The school was growing fast with a student body of about fifty young men, including six Indians and twenty English charity scholars. By September, shortly after Wentworth’s visit, the student body was at seventy including eighteen Indian youth. The governor returned to Portsmouth by a far more circuitous route of first heading north up the Connecticut River to the 45th degree of latitude and then easterly thru the dense wilderness so that he

could inspect the King's forests, in the discharge of his duty as Royal Surveyor of the King's Forests, and then back down to Portsmouth.

Royal Governor John Wentworth II visited Hanover for the third and last time the following year, once again for the College's commencement exercises, presumably traveling over the new highway. He was not able to be at commencement exercises in 1774; and by the summer of 1775 he had fled New Hampshire in the wake of the outbreak of war with Great Britain in Lexington and Concord several months earlier.

In later years the road came to be known as just Wolfeboro Road; and within the records of the Town of Hanover was numbered Highway #2, in recognition that it was probably the second road in Hanover to not only be properly laid out but also to be mapped and recorded as such. And, similar to many early roads, and especially the longer ones, over the years the location has shifted with and without the benefit of surveys and deeds. The entire road remained in use through the nineteenth century until sections of the road within the Camp Brook area were impacted by the construction of the first two reservoirs in 1893. By the early 1930's other sections of the road were to become subject to "Gates and Bars" and / or unmaintained Class VI designation. How far to the east beyond Hanover's border the road was completed, where it ran, and sections of it what might survive to this day, this writer does not know.

In conclusion, the remnants of Wolfeboro Road that two and one half centuries later still survive within the town of Hanover are an important link to not only Hanover and Dartmouth College's earliest shared history, but highlight that New Hampshire's provincial political powers, situated almost a world away in Portsmouth, understood the importance and the need to establish an east – west highway between the two great watersheds of the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers, through dense almost impenetrable wilderness, for political, social, and economic reasons. And so the "Wolfeborough" Road was constructed - the first of many regional roads that were to follow. And, the Wolfeboro Road highlights a characteristic exhibited by Hanover's earliest inhabitants – the active promotion of and participation in the creation of public infrastructure beyond just the borders of their town.

As early as 1762, a year after the Town's chartering and three years before the first settlers permanently located within the town, Hanover joined other towns as far south as Charlestown in the expense of creating an open trail along the easterly bank of the River that soon became known, perhaps a bit tongue in cheek, as the "Great Road," that at first just reached Hanover's northerly border with Lyme, but by late in the decade extended as far north as Haverhill. In 1800 it was primarily Hanover and Lebanon that secured from the New Hampshire Legislature the charter to construct the all-important Fourth New Hampshire Turnpike that ran from Concord to West Lebanon with a spur from Lebanon into Hanover. Several years later it was a Hanover resident who, at huge expense, constructed canal locks on the Connecticut River at the location of the present day Wilder Dam so that large flat boats could travel from Wells River, Vermont to Hartford, Connecticut and return. In the mid 1840's it was again Hanover working with Lebanon that after considerable effort broke the political stronghold that Jacksonian Democrats had in Concord, that was preventing the construction of railroads within the State. In 1847, when the Northern Railroad of New Hampshire was opened from Concord to Lebanon, it was largely the result of leadership that was initially spawned in Hanover, a fact acknowledged by the great Senator Daniel Webster himself.

The Wolfeboro Road, in addition to being a beautiful scenic and recreational asset of the Town of Hanover, is also an important historical reminder of the regional vision and political leadership that was to benefit the area as a whole, that right from the start was to proudly distinguish the citizens of Hanover.

For the Town of Hanover
Frank J. Barrett, Jr.
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The development of colonial roads across the province undertaken by Governor John Wentworth

1. A road was ordered to be cut from Durham to Haverhill, by way of Plymouth, in 1763, and again in 1769. By 1771 it was only as far north as Gilmanton.
2. The Crawford Notch road was ordered to be cut in 1769, but by 1777 was still impassable.
3. The Wolfeborough Road was ordered to be cut in 1770, and became passible, at least in part, in 1772.
4. The Pinkham Notch road was ordered to be cut in 1772, but not completed until 1781.
5. The "Province Road" from Boscawen to Charlestown was ordered to be cut in 1769, and was somewhat passible by 1771.
6. The "Cohas Road" around the east side of the White Mountains was ordered to be cut in 1772. It appears that little came of that effort.