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HISTORY OF

LIMERICK, MAINE

BY: LOUISE LAMPREY

History of Limerick

UNLESS we some day cram into the present all that is worth doing at all, the history of a family, a town, a race, must be vitally related to its life to-day and to-morrow. We must know and understand the life of the past if we would rightly comprehend our own.

We find, for example, that descendants of more than half the original settlers of Limerick who laid our foundations 164 to 140 years ago are living here now. (This is unusual in New England, where changing national and industrial conditions have led the people of small towns to move into the cities or to some locality where for personal reasons they preferred to live.) A certain tenacity in preserving old American traditions has resulted. When the alumni of the old Academy have their annual dinner and dance, "Hull's Victory" and other country dances even older are on the program. The Masons, when their lodge was founded in 1824, held their meetings on the Wednesday before the full moon, for convenience in travelling unlighted country roads; and they still do, although they drive in cars with headlights. Garrets and eave closets hold quaint costumes and properties for old-

time plays. When the Limerick Weavers revived handloom weaving three years ago, two old looms were retrieved from those same attic treasuries and used to weave suitings, rugs, scarfs and bags. Limerick knows what it is to be proud of the past.

Until the fall of Quebec ended the French and Indian raids on the line of tiny frontier villages between the Saco and the Connecticut, inland Maine was scarcely settled at all. But the story of Limerick really antedates this long century of savage warfare. In 1668, lumbermen, traders and adventurous trappers from older settlements were already beginning to penetrate the untamed wilderness to the north, with little or no opposition. There were sawmills on the Merrimac and the Mousam, to which logs could be rafted down. Humphrey Chadbourne's logging-camp at Effingham was a landmark mentioned in the deed acquired by Francis Small in that year from the Indian chief "Captain Sunday" or Sandy, covering a tract twenty miles square between the Ossipee and Little Ossipee Rivers, later called the "Five Ossipee Towns." When the first settlers came to Parsonsfield they found a well-marked trail leading from that camp site through Cornish.

The double-dealing that sometimes occurred in colonial history was not invariably at the expense of the red men. Tricking an outsider was perfectly allow-

able, according to Indian ethics. Some years before, all of this and some adjacent territory had been granted by the chief of the Sokokis to Major Phillips of Saco. Captain Sandy was a petty sachem over Berwick way. Small, who lived in Kittery, had a trading post frequented by some of this chief's followers, and one night it was plundered and burned by them. To avert possible consequences the wily savage offered Small this tract, to which he had no more title than he had to the town of Boston, by way of compensation. That unsuspecting trader, knowing nothing of the previous grant, accepted, conveyed a part of it later to Major Nicholas Shapleigh of Kittery, and in 1711 made over a part of the remaining title to his son Francis. These conflicting claims led to considerable bewilderment and controversy after both Phillips and Small were dead, and delayed the settlement of land whose ownership was doubtful.

The real beginning of the town history, therefore, was just before the Revolution, when some enterprising pioneers of southern New Hampshire, coast-of-Maine and Massachusetts families pushed inland and secured possession of a tract north of the Little Ossipee, on which the first group of cabins was built at what is now known as Felch's Corners. Isaiah Foster is said to have been the first settler and to have arrived in 1775. But not quite a hundred years ago

George Ford, on his farm near the Little Ossipee, dug up a lead tablet near a big pine stump, bearing the names of the original fourteen men who took up land on the present site of Limerick. This is the inscription :

T. Gilpatrick	
B. Nason	J. Cole
S. Wingate	J. Gilpatrick
E. Allen	J. Morrill
O. Emery	J. Sullivan
E. Bradbury	W. Cole
J. Stimson	J. Staples
B. Staples	Anno 1772, May 15th

The reverse side reads :

"Daniel Ridlon, olim animo possessidendi.

Witness: D. King,

J. Wingate,

Limbrick."

John Wingate received three lots for his services as surveyor, and chose them in the northwest part of the town. In the person of James Sullivan, one of the original proprietors thus recorded, a thread of romance and great achievement enters the weaving of our narrative.

In 1723 John Sullivan, who was born in Limerick, Ireland, during the siege of 1691, quarrelled with his family because they opposed his marrying where he pleased, and sailed, almost penniless, for America. The ship was blown out of her course, and he was landed at York, in Maine, indebted to the captain for his passage. Parson Moody of York aided him to discharge this obligation and set up as a schoolmaster, he being a man of education. Later he removed to Berwick, married a young orphan girl, Margery Brown, who had come over on the same ship, and had several sons, of whom one became General Sullivan of Revolutionary renown. James, the fourth son, born in 1744, might also have been a soldier but for an accident when, as a boy, he was felling a tree, and one leg was caught in its fall and broken, laming him for life. At twenty he began studying law in his older brother's office, and later set up an office in Biddeford, where John Adams met and liked him. The custom of "riding circuit" which brought Boston lawyers into remote outlying districts, also took business away

from the local lawyers, but James Sullivan got on nevertheless. Adams wrote to his wife that the young man, though he "began with neither learning, books, estate or anything but his head and hands," owned in 1774 six mills, including saw-mill, corn-mill, fulling mill and scythe mill, and had property worth five or six thousand pounds. He bought many farms from Saco men who wished to move to the new country, and in the years before the Revolution, when great issues caused private lawsuits to be neglected, he went into the Ossipee tract and secured this farm within the present limits of Limerick, returning once a week to Biddeford to keep in touch with his affairs there. Through his influence the new town was called Limerick in memory of his father's birthplace. The tract had been known as Sullivan. He doubtless was of service to the other men in securing legal title to their land. The metal plate recording new ownership was a rather common expedient in colonial days, where land changed hands in a wild region still unorganized. In the eight years between the time when it was affixed to the big pine, the tree might have fallen by lightning, or in time the memorial, forgotten or lost sight of, perhaps was obscured by new growth. In 1774 James Sullivan was a delegate to the Continental Congress; he served on the Committee of Safety; after he removed to Boston he founded and

was the first president of the Massachusetts Historical Society, which in 1792 celebrated the tercentenary of the landing of Columbus. Jeremy Belknap, the orator of the day, the governor and his council, dined at Judge Sullivan's house in Bowdoin Square. In 1795 he wrote the first history of Maine. He was elected governor of Massachusetts in 1807, re-elected in 1809 and died that year. While Governor he aided in putting through the "Betterment Act" or "Squatter Law" as it was commonly called, to the benefit of Maine settlers.

In 1780 there were at least twelve families in Limerick. Isaiah Foster settled on the "William B. Bangs place," Abijah Felch at Felch's Corners, Penuel Clark and the Perrys to the northwest. April 10, 1786, the people addressed a petition to the Massachusetts General Court, asking to be incorporated as a town. The first town meeting was in the tavern of Captain Jacob Bradbury, who was moderator; Abijah Felch was clerk; Captain Bradbury, Joseph and Major Thomas Gilpatrick were the first board of selectmen. In 1792 the Baptists built a meetinghouse, the lower story of which was used as a town hall. The upper floor, with its high pulpit, square and long pews and singers' gallery, was used for services until March, 1852. Then the old unpainted building was taken down, and November 17th the new church was dedi-

cated, Alvan Felch preaching the sermon. Major Sinclair of Biddeford took the building contract for \$1,000.

This church was organized August 25, 1796, at the house of Deacon Jacob Mills, on the land cleared twenty years before by Isaiah Foster. Abijah Felch, Amariah Lord and Jacob Mills were appointed a committee to lay out the Baptist Society's money, \$60. The 26 original members called Elder Ebenezer Kinsman as the first pastor, September 3, 1796. He remained eleven years and while preaching in Limington during the next twenty years often supplied the Limerick church. He died in 1830. Until some fifty years ago, money was raised for the minister's salary in this part of Maine by subscription, and in addition a yearly donation party was held, not counted toward the specified salary, at which the contributions of farm produce, wood, and other commodities came to from \$50 to \$100 more. The minister in such a pioneer town was an intimate figure in its life. In a scrap of local history is recorded a diphtheria epidemic in 1799—they called it "the throat distemper"—in which Elder Kinsman lost four children in a few weeks, John Perry lost four, and the deaths were four or five times the average mortality. Physicians were scarce then, and Parson Adams of Newfield, a Harvard graduate, is said to have been doctor as well as preacher

in several towns, of which Limerick in 1780 apparently was one. In 1820, with 1,377 people, Limerick's deaths numbered 17; between 1802 and 1828 twelve old people died, from 84 to 97 years of age.

In 1793 the Congregationalists built a meeting-house, and organized their church on July 5, 1795. In November, 1795, their first pastor, Rev. Edmond Eastman, a Dartmouth graduate, was ordained, and remained until his death December 9, 1812, at the age of 46. He was responsible for Limerick Village being where it is, instead of at Felch's Corners, where the earliest settlement was made. His conviction that this was the place for the church caused him to persuade his people to give the land for this purpose where the present village is, and his house was on the hill where the late Dr. Herman Tibbetts' home now stands. The tradition is that he went to Boston, on foot, to get the charter of the academy. His shoes wearing out he made part of the journey barefoot. A pastor of this church, Rev. Charles Freeman, a Bowdoin man, remained from 1820 until his death in 1852, something of a record but not a rare one in those days of settled habits. It was not unusual for a minister to settle down and buy a home in a parish he liked, and perhaps, after his retirement from the ministry, to found or take charge of an academy. Such a case was that of the Rev. Porter Burbank, who was at one time

principal of Limerick Academy.

The third of the three churches in the town, the Free-Will Baptist, was organized in 1822, under the leadership of Elias Libby, afterward its pastor. This denomination came into being about 1780 in New Hampshire, and in 1814 held a series of meetings in Limerick. In 1821 regular services were held, the first speaker being a New Hampshire woman. This was one of the three sects which in the early years of anti-slavery societies unwaveringly held that the "peculiar institution" was not morally justified. The other two were the Quakers, who had always taken that stand, and the Scotch Covenanters. In 1825 the *Morning Star*, the Free-Will Baptist weekly, was started, and its first issue was printed in Limerick, in a building at the corner of Main Street and the road to the mills, James Buzzell of Parsonsfield being the editor. This building was burned, and for a time the paper was printed in the upper story of the house across the street, later occupied by Berry's store. For many years the little weekly could not secure a franchise because of its position on slavery, although its remarks on the subject were very mild compared with the kind of thing popularly supposed to be New England abolition literature. It had to depend on the honor of its subscribers and advertisers for its revenue, and was printed in Dover, N. H., and other places, wherever it could find quarters. People were hesitant about

renting rooms to a concern when a pro-slavery mob might come breaking the windows. When every slave State had a law against sending any literature that even discussed slavery through the mails, publications like *Harper's* and *Godey's* would not risk their circulation by even mentioning the dangerous topic. The four-page *Morning Star* was one of the papers the mere possession of which, used to press botanical specimens in a traveller's trunk, would cause a man to be sent to jail, as in Washington, or dragged from his hotel and beaten, as happened in Nashville. There was really nothing incendiary in its contents; most of it was denominational news; but it did on occasion print news and information regarding slavery, generally first-hand observations by somebody who had seen it work. Now and then it published a theological argument that was based on Biblical grounds, to prove slavery not a divine institution.

Early in the town history the importance of education was recognized; in fact, the petition of the settlers in 1787 mentions "the difficulty and Impracticability of establishing and Supporting the Gospel and Schools of Learning among us" without a proper town government, as a reason for their action. Limerick Academy was chartered in 1808 and opened in 1810, educating both boys and girls; many of them by 1830 were serving as school teachers in neighboring towns.

At the latter date five Limerick youths were at college and seven young men of the town had become practicing physicians. The old school had less than half a century ago a hundred to a hundred and fifty students, but with the general establishment of high schools and colleges throughout the State, the demand which it met, for an education higher than that of the district school for country boys and girls who came as day or boarding pupils, has disappeared. A modern building houses both grade and high schools, and the academy has become Odd Fellows' Hall.

Limerick has through one of its daughters contributed very materially to education in a wider field. The amazingly effective work which children's libraries are doing all over the country owes more, perhaps, to Anne Carroll Moore than to any other one librarian. She did much to organize the central and branch libraries for children in New York in 1896-1906 and later. Her father, Luther Moore, built the house now occupied by Mr. Macmillan, and it figures in *Nicholas*, her charming book for children.

Like other inland New England towns, Limerick was affected somewhat by the embargo that tied up the coastwise and foreign trade in the War of 1812. Supplementary acts even forbade the river traffic, then almost the only means that such towns had of getting tools, weapons and other manufactured goods, or com-

modities like molasses (then commonly used instead of the more costly sugar), and of sending to market their own farm produce, barrel staves or other goods in exchange. The result, however, was to stimulate home production; when they could not buy what they must have the settlers made it. The extent to which they could supply their needs in their own towns and even send a surplus elsewhere appears from a list of the trades carried on in Limerick fifteen years after the embargo was a thing of the past. There were four blacksmith shops, four makers of furniture, chaises and wagons, four shoemakers—within the memory of the oldest man in Limerick to-day, Mr. Knight, there were seventeen shoemakers here, of whom he is the last—three tanneries, two hatmakers, two harness-makers. Every farmer had his flock of sheep, whose fleeces, and some home-grown flax, were spun and woven in his own house, either by the wife and daughters or girls hired for such work. And at that, nine-tenths of the people were farmers, getting their main income from the sale of cattle, hay and dairy products. In 1846 woolen mills were started, and in 1857 Joshua Holland bought the property and founded the factory village of Hollandville, now known as Deepvale and occupied by the yarn mill. The blankets woven there in Holland's time were famous. The Swasey furniture factory in 1872 was making school and church furniture for outside markets.

In 1854 Robert Cole built a hotel on the site of the Bradbury Inn, but it was destroyed by fire. The present hotel was built as a residence by General Macdonald, and the frescoed walls of the hall and guest-chamber are interesting. These landscaped walls are found in many houses in this vicinity. One of the old houses at Felch's Corners has the original sliding shutters which slid into the wall. Most of the timber in such old buildings was not mill-sawed, but hewn by the broad-axe and fitted together without nails, it being less trouble to shape the log on the spot than to take it to the mill. Here, too, is sometimes found a feature peculiar to the Maine story-and-a-half house, the "dresser-room," a room tucked in between kitchen and sitting-room and used as a combination pantry, storeroom and china closet. It had a window, a broad shelf for kegs and sacks, and others for such utensils as dye-pots, candle-moulds and so on, used only now and then.

A picturesque incident is connected with one of these older houses, now occupied by Mr. and Mrs. George Colby. For a long time a local Indian tribe used to come through Limerick twice a year on the way to their fishing and hunting grounds. When they were camped in the meadow near this house a terrific rainstorm came up, blew down their lodges and put out their fires. Thereupon Mrs. Colby's grandfather

went down there with a lantern and invited the whole company to come and spend the night in his house, which they thankfully did,—braves, squaws and children sleeping rolled up in their blankets on the floor of the kitchen and the room adjoining. After that they always brought him a present of game or fish in passing through the town. If these old houses could talk, their recollections would make a chronicle more curious and dramatic than most fiction. That is the way with old towns.

Record of Events

- 1668 Francis Small acquired title to land.
- 1771 Lands divided.
- 1775 First settlement said to have been made by Isaiah Foster.
- 1780 Plantation of Limerick organized.
- 1787 Incorporation as a town.
- 1792 Baptists erected meeting-house. 1796 Baptist church founded. 1852 present Baptist church erected.
- 1793 Congregationalists built meeting-house. 1795 Congregational church founded. 1833 present church erected.
- 1808 Limerick Academy chartered. Building erected and opened 1810, burned 1851, rebuilt and again burned, 1870, present building erected 1880 and occupied until the modern school building for both grade and high schools was completed 1924.
- 1825 *Morning Star*, Free-Will Baptist weekly, founded.
- 1822 Free Baptist church founded, meeting-house erected 1837, rebuilt 1864.

- 1846 Limerick Manufacturing Company established.
- 1857 Joshua Holland purchased property and founded the Holland Mills. 1899 Limerick Mills for yarn manufacture incorporated.
- 1854 Limerick House erected by Robert Cole on site of the Bradbury Inn.
- 1860 Town Hall built.
- 1868 Franklin Library Association organized, Mrs. Alice Boynton, librarian.
- 1870 Emery's Corner annexed from Limington.
- 1882 Limerick National Bank organized. After bank failures of 1933 Limerick branch of Casco Bank and Trust Company founded December 11, 1933.
- 1933 Limerick Weavers established for hand-loom weaving.
- 1879, 1880 and 1899 Disastrous fires destroyed many buildings in the village. In 1900 dam and three buildings in Hollandville destroyed in big freshet; dam rebuilt.
- 1823 Limerick and Parsonsfield Masons organized Freedom Lodge, No. 43, on the Middle Road in Parsonsfield.
- 1875 Highland Lodge of Odd Fellows instituted.
- 1907 Limerick Water and Electric Company established. 1916 name changed to Western Maine

Power Company. 1925 absorbed by Central Maine.

1887 Grange founded.

1927 Edwin Cobb, our last Civil War veteran, died, aged 84. 79 men enlisted from Limerick and 15 Limerick men living elsewhere for service in that war, all volunteers.

Captain Nathaniel Leavitt served in the Revolution, as did Major Thomas Gilpatrick. Colonial and militia officers here were Colonel Humphrey Duke, Captain Jacob Bradbury, Lieutenant Penuel Clark and Ensign James Perry.

Joseph Hayes served in the Mexican War.

Richard White of Limerick was killed in the Spanish War. Ernest A. Sadler and Cecil Sadler, Spanish War veterans, later became residents of the town.

Limerick had not only militia but an artillery company, founded 1836. Cannon Hill is so named because the cannon was mounted there. Peter Fogg made the cartridges for training day, and had charge of the powder house on the ledge near the lower cemetery. The cannon with which the artillery trained was borrowed from Limington and came from a brig in Portland harbor.

During the World War 48 men went from Limerick, who now form the Richard White Post.

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