

# SETTLING THE MAINE WILDERNESS



## Moses Greenleaf, Maine's First Mapmaker

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### LESSON 5

### *Resident Land Agent*

#### SUBJECT

Exploration of the role of resident land agent in the settlement of Maine.

#### STUDENTS WILL

Recognize that Moses Greenleaf's decision to become William Dodd's partner offered benefits and risks

VOCABULARY *See note regarding vocabulary in "How to Use" section*

resident land agent, Continental Congress, dispatch rider, estate, John Hancock, mortgage, aristocracy, Boston's blue book, ferment, adage, vindication, apostle, six-year note, commonwealth, ominous

#### PREPARATION

1. Read the "Moses Greenleaf Primer," the "Introduction to Moses Greenleaf," and part of Chapter 4 of *Settling the Maine Wilderness*, "North of the Piscataquis," pages 16-17.
2. Copy Primer, Introduction, and pages 16-17 for each student.

## BODY OF LESSON

### Activity 1.

Have students read the materials and discuss the goals and personality traits of Moses Greenleaf and William Dodd as a class. You may want to create a Venn diagram showing what these men shared and how they differed. Alternatively, each student could create an individual list, noting the attributes of each man. Ask students to brainstorm the details of the contract between Greenleaf and Dodd. List the obligations on chart paper or the whiteboard, where students can easily refer to them. **(Knowledge, Comprehension)**

### Activity 2.

Moses Greenleaf's decision to become William Dodd's partner and resident land agent for Williamsburg offered benefits and risks. Divide the class into groups of 3 students and have each choose position A, B, or C. Each group will rehearse and then present their positions as a skit to the rest of the class.

#### ***Student A defends the following position:***

"The agreement with William Dodd has more advantages than disadvantages, Go for it, Moses!"

#### ***Student B defends the opposite position:***

"Moses, you must be crazy to even consider this deal with Dodd!"

#### ***Student C is Moses Greenleaf***

He/she should ask A and B to clarify, defend, and elaborate on their respective positions.

#### **(Application, Analysis)**

### Activity 3. Class discussion.

Ask the students if they would have signed the contract to become the resident agent for the township of Williamsburg. Why or why not? **(Application, Synthesis)**

## ASSESSMENT

Did the groups support their answers with specific details from the reading?  
(See Teacher Reference Sheet for expected answers.)

## EXTENSION

1. Discuss the concept that land became more valuable with an increase in the number of neighbors, roads, and other benefits to society. Ask students whether this is the case today. **(Synthesis)**

1. Bring in a developer from the town to talk to the class about his/her work. **(Knowledge)**

## Teacher Reference Sheet Resident Land Agent

### *Vocabulary:*

Continental Congress: The revolutionary government of the colonies.

dispatch rider: A person who carried messages, like Paul Revere.

estate: the money and real estate left by a person when they die.

John Hancock: A leader of the Revolution in Massachusetts.

mortgage: a loan on a piece of real estate.

aristocracy: upper class

competence: expertise

independence: freedom

rank: status

respectability: dignity.

### Information to include in Discussion and Activities

#### 1. William Dodd

Was ambitious and hoped to become wealthy through land investments

Owned some property in Boston

Was 51 years old when he went into business with Greenleaf

Was initially interested in going to Maine himself

#### 2. What led Moses to the position of resident land agent:

The opportunity to own part of a township north of the Piscataquis River

The land was fertile

Waterpower was available nearby to run mills

Large numbers of people from Massachusetts were moving to Maine to establish farms

Moses was fascinated by the stories he heard from explorers and surveyors about the land north of the Piscataquis River. He came to believe that he could survey and map the area, purchase and sell land, settle there and live as an independent gentleman.

#### 3. Reasons Greenleaf took the position:

To make a new start in life

He was eager to escape a conventional career and lifestyle

He was searching for independence, rank, and respectability

He hoped to create his own aristocracy on Greenleaf Hill  
He hoped to convince others to share in his vision

4. The responsibilities of the land agent were:

Moses could chose to purchase 1/4 of Williamsburg for \$5,920.

Within three years he must bring ten persons or families to Williamsburg.

Within the following three years, he must bring ten persons or families to Williamsburg each year.

Each person or family must take up residence and build a suitable dwelling.

Moses must move his family to Williamsburg within four years or pay a penalty of \$500.

Price of land would begin at \$1.00 per acre for the first 10 families, increase to \$1.10 for the second ten families, and increase to \$1.25 after the settlement of 30 families.

Moses would survey lots, lay out roads, and pay half the cost of building roads.

If Moses did not meet the conditions, he would not be paid for his work.

Moses could select the lot he wanted to settle on.

5. Disadvantages of the position:

Greenleaf had to accept all of the responsibility for finding settlers and surveying, and pay half the cost of building roads. If he did not find enough settlers to meet the requirements of Massachusetts, Moses would not be paid for his work.

Land sales were speculative and variable, and were therefore financially risky.  
After Greenleaf took the position as land agent, land sales began to decline.

6. Land in Williamsburg was not selling because:

Most settlers looking for land had no cash, only goods and services to barter.

Most settlers could not afford 6 per cent interest on a mortgage.

In 1820, the unsold public land was divided between Maine and Massachusetts, which complicated land sales.

7. Cost of land in the early 1800s:

Public land in Maine was selling for 30 to 60 cents per acre and public land in Massachusetts was very sparse.

Privately-owned land in Williamsburg was priced at \$1.50 per acre.

Moses Greenleaf had purchased his land in Williamsburg for approximately \$1 per acre.

#### 8. Greenleaf's plan as land agent:

Lower the price of land in Williamsburg

Accept whatever a settler could offer as a down payment

Give the settlers the necessities of life on credit

Provide work for the settlers in mining slate and iron when they were not farming

Apply the wages earned in mining toward paying for the settler's supplies and land

#### 9. Why Greenleaf's plan did not succeed:

William Dodd died in 1825, his property passed to nine heirs scattered around the country, and none of them was interested in supporting Moses' plan.

The necessary and important improvements in transportation were realized mostly after Greenleaf's death from typhoid fever in 1834.

#### Summary of Greenleaf's contributions to Maine's transportation:

In 1813, Moses had proposed a system of canals to connect Bangor to the interior.

In 1817, the Pushaw Canal Corporation was chartered to begin the canal, but it was never built.

In 1816, Moses had surveyed and supervised the construction of a State road from Bangor through Milo, Brownfield and Williamsburg to the township where he had found iron ore, but the cost of hauling heavy freight by road was very expensive.

In 1833, the Bangor & Piscataquis Canal and Railroad Company was chartered, Moses as President and Eben as Secretary, to use a combination of canals and railroads to provide inexpensive transportation in the interior, but the railroad did not reach Milo until 1870.

# SETTLING THE MAINE WILDERNESS



Moses Greenleaf,

His Maps, and His Household of Faith, 1777-1834

Osher Map Library & Smith Center for Cartographic Education

[www.usm.maine.edu/maps/home.html](http://www.usm.maine.edu/maps/home.html)

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## **Introduction to Moses Greenleaf Maine's First Mapmaker**

In the years following the American Revolution, which was from 1775-1783, many people moved to the region that is now Maine. In fact, between the years 1790 and 1810, the population of Maine nearly doubled! One of the people who came to Maine during this time was a young boy named Moses Greenleaf, who would grow up to be the first cartographer (mapmaker) of the State of Maine.

Most people in early America were farmers, although some made a living in the growing cities. Shipbuilding, storekeeping, and carriage-making were profitable businesses in the cities. Many of the new settlers of Maine, including the Greenleafs, came from southern New England, particularly Massachusetts and Connecticut. The populations there had been growing rapidly and people were looking for more land for farming and for harvesting natural resources such as timber.

While many people were happy with the growing cities and prospering businesses of southern New England, others longed for a simpler way of life. The District of Maine, which was then part of Massachusetts, had large towns along the coast, but much of the interior was open and available for settlement. Land was inexpensive and plentiful, and Moses

Greenleaf's father was eager to move his family to a more rural environment.

In 1790, the Greenleafs left their home in Newburyport, Massachusetts, and moved to Peacock Hill, in New Gloucester, Maine. Captain Moses Greenleaf, father of the mapmaker, was determined to spend his "evenings by the fire and his days close to the soil." He was worried that wealth was becoming too important to many people in Newburyport, so he gave up his business to become a farmer and a country gentleman.

Moses the mapmaker was thirteen when the family moved to New Gloucester. The oldest of five children, he had spent his early years in Newburyport, a town booming with activity and widening interests. He learned draftsmanship and naval architecture from his father, and was a strong student, particularly in mathematics. He was an avid reader with an excellent memory and excellent penmanship. Although his formal education was not extensive, he had a solid background in the basic skills and a strong interest in everything around him.

Moses grew into an easy-going, likable young man with a quick mind and strong writing and speaking skills. When he turned twenty-one, he opened a store in New Gloucester, selling "razors, files, penknives, beef shad, tobacco by the pound, cider by the barrel, rum by the gill, blank books, gum paper, twine – in short, everything from tea to the pot in which to brew it."

Moses kept store for the next seven years, in several Maine towns. He taught school for awhile, but his greatest interest was in land, especially the land to the north, "where a man might own part of a township and live as an independent gentleman." His consuming interest in the land north of the Piscataquis River, along with the debt that came from his kindheartedness, ended his storekeeping career, and led him to a life promoting the sale of land in Maine.

In 1805 Moses married Persis Poor of Bangor, and shortly thereafter took a job as land agent for William Dodd, owner of a large tract of land in Maine. As land agent, Greenleaf agreed to settle and develop a new town near the Sebec River. The town was named Williamsburg, after William Dodd, and Moses and Persis moved there with their children on December 30 of 1810.

Moses Greenleaf had a vision for the kind of town he wished Williamsburg to become, and he spent the rest of his life working toward that vision. In 1814 he built a new home on Greenleaf Hill, and continued to encourage other members of his family to join him in Williamsburg. He established a town government, built a church and a school, and started



community organizations in an attempt to convince other people to move to the new town. He promoted the use of the area's natural resources, notably slate and iron, to create jobs for the people living in Williamsburg. He built roads and brought railroads to the area, so that people could move themselves and their products around. Eventually, stagecoach and mail service came to Williamsburg, signs of a successful settlement.

Moses became a distinguished member of the Williamsburg community, and he served as a Court Justice for several years. In his effort to encourage settlement in Maine, he worked to gather information about the interior sections of Maine. He took trips to survey and map the unsettled land, and collected geographical information about lakes, rivers, mountains, resources, and climate. Greenleaf then published books and maps describing the land and encouraging people to move there.

In 1815 Moses Greenleaf's first map of the District of Maine was printed. Although other maps of the area existed, Moses' maps were important because they showed geographical features, distances, and other aspects of the Maine landscape that had not been widely known before his maps were published. Moses continually updated his maps and produced the first map of Maine when it became a state in 1820, making him Maine's first cartographer. After publishing two books and several maps, Moses Greenleaf died in 1834. A monument to him was erected in 1947 to acknowledge his contributions to the settlement of Maine.

After Moses died, his son Moses Jr. helped to promote and publish more of Moses' detailed maps and information. Moses' maps helped encourage settlement throughout Maine, but his own town of Williamsburg reverted to a township when its population declined after mass migration to the mid-western states following the Civil War. Even so, Moses Greenleaf's foresight in helping to make people aware of the geography and resources of Maine was so important that he deserves to be remembered as one of principal founders of the State of Maine.

# Chapter Four

## NORTH OF THE PISCATAQUIS



*However improbable it may appear to you, who draw your analogies from that part of the country which is under your immediate observation, a society will in a very few years, be found north of the Piscataquis which will approach nearer to your own ideas of the useful and agreeable, than any I am acquainted with in any of the country towns of Maine.*

MOSES GREENLEAF TO ELEAZER ALLEY JENKS, SEPTEMBER 14, 1806

What is known of William Dodd can be quickly told. We meet him galloping down the post roads as a dispatch rider, bearing messages for the Continental Congress and probably paid by John Hancock. There is a moment of notoriety when a British spy relieves him of several dispatches, and then we lose sight of William until we find him in Boston selling groceries amid the smells and sounds of Hancock Wharf. Both his store and the brick house on Fish Street where he lived were the property of the Hancock family, but Dodd had acquired some property of his own. He owned a house on the same street, held a five-thousand-dollar mortgage on the wharf, and, of course, possessed some twenty-four thousand acres in Maine.

When his time came, he was buried at Copp's Hill, leaving an estate of fourteen thousand dollars that, after all his bills were paid, netted his wife four hundred. As for his township, the value had dropped from one dollar to thirty cents per acre. None of his family ever moved north to that township or became rich enough to be listed in Boston's blue book.

When Greenleaf and Dodd met, the latter was much involved in the new ferment of building

personal and family empires. The Revolution transmuted the old adage "Honor is ancient riches" to "Honor is new riches"—and especially the possession of land. Dodd like so many others was grasping for the top. What Moses brought to their association was a vision of a new beginning where money and the power of influence were not everything and where there was an opportunity for a natural vindication of the noble spirit. Moses was twenty-nine and filled with enthusiasm for the opportunities ahead, while William Dodd was fifty-one, old enough to hope for one last gamble at success. Dodd's investment in Maine lands took on additional meaning as he listened to Moses, for in those days the younger man spoke with the power of an apostle of escaping the establishment and the system. For a time Dodd himself was determined to join Moses and to go north. But in the end his agreement with Moses was strictly a business deal.

There is no question that Greenleaf saw in the land north of the Piscataquis a place for a new start. He had four objectives: independence, rank, competence, and respectability.<sup>1</sup> One gathers from certain passages in his letters that he sought the chance to form his own aristocracy, but his intentions had breadth. He wanted these

objectives to become real, not only for himself, but also for all those whom he would gather on the high hills of Williamsburg.

But what were the risks? His agreement with William Dodd, finalized in 1806, shifted to Greenleaf's shoulders all those requirements regarding settlement of the town that the commonwealth of Massachusetts demanded. For this burden, Moses gained the chance to purchase one-fourth of Williamsburg on a six-year note along with the right to pay off this note through his share of the profits.

There were in all eleven clauses in the contract between William Dodd, merchant, and Moses Greenleaf, yeoman. Their content dealt mainly with the matter of settlement. The commonwealth intended that whatever tracts of land it sold in the district of Maine would be populated. To implement this program, conditions were written into the deeds giving time limits in which a proprietor was to have land cleared and a certain number of families settled with fires burning on their hearths. As a partner, and as Dodd's agent, it was Moses' responsibility to settle Williamsburg at his own expense.

In the three years following the signing of the agreement, Moses was to bring "ten persons or families" to Williamsburg, and ten more each year thereafter for the next three years. To be counted among the forty settlers, a man must take up his residence and build a "suitable dwelling." Moses, himself, was given four years in which to move his family north, for as the agreement clearly stated, it was the "principle object with said Dodd to have said Greenleaf a permanent settler and resident in said town."<sup>2</sup> If Moses failed to move to Williamsburg, he was to pay Dodd a five-hundred-dollar penalty.

Greenleaf was to take charge of selling lots to settlers on a price scale stipulated in the agreement. There was an interesting bit of logic behind this scale. Supposedly the land would become more valuable with an increase of neighbors, roads, and the general benefits of society. Consequently the first group of ten settlers

would pay \$1.00 per acre; the next group of ten would find the price risen to \$1.10. The price then rose to \$1.25 per acre and finally, after the settlement of thirty families, to \$1.50.

The surveying of lots and the laying out of roads were also to be Moses' responsibility. Dodd placed a limit on the road-building clause—no more than thirty-six miles at no higher cost than thirty dollars per mile. The expenses of road building and town settling were to be shared by both parties, one-fourth by Moses and three-fourths by Dodd. Both partners agreed to share the cost of any increased requirements demanded by the commonwealth. Should they lose their township through failure to meet the stipulations of the original deed from Massachusetts, Moses would forfeit any amount owed to him for his labors and services but retrieve whatever he had managed to pay on his note to Dodd. Neither party was to "divide his portion of the township from the other" until the settlement mentioned in the agreement was completed. Finally, Moses was granted the right to choose his own homestead in any place he most desired. On these terms Greenleaf and Dodd became, in a sense, joint proprietors of Williamsburg. Moses took the risks, signed a note for \$5,920, and the agreement was sealed.

Moses left Boston, where he had finalized his pact with Dodd in the middle of March 1806, and headed back to his wife and five-month-old son. On his way to Bangor he stopped off in Newburyport, where he sold to his grandfather a square mile of Williamsburg. Old Jonathan Greenleaf dickered well with his grandson, getting this land for ninety-four cents per acre with an additional 160 acres thrown in, the latter to come from Moses' quarter of the town. It was an ominous beginning, but apparently Moses had no misgivings. In fact, as we shall see, his optimism was soon to lead him to assume additional obligations involving the selling and settlements of Maine lands.

In truth the land situation was becoming grim. The flux of immigration into the district had abated from its high point at the turn of the