

SETTLING THE MAINE WILDERNESS



Moses Greenleaf, Maine's First Mapmaker

LESSON 8

Settling Williamsburg

SUBJECT

Nineteenth century settlement of Williamsburg, a town in the Maine wilderness

STUDENTS WILL

Understand the process of settling inland towns on the Maine frontier

VOCABULARY surveying, typhoid fever

PREPARATION

1. Read the attached texts, "Moses Greenleaf and the Maine North Woods, 1806-1834" and "Williamsburg Settlement, 1800-1930." Look at and compare the following maps of Williamsburg: "1820 Williamsburg Area" (showing surrounding towns, roads, and rivers—a part of Greenleaf's 1820 "Map of the State of Maine") and "1833 Williamsburg" (showing individual's property lots relative to roads and rivers. This ca. 1833 map is a tracing by Walter Macdougall of a map probably drawn by Greenleaf at the Piscataquis County Courthouse in Dover-Foxcroft, Maine.) Make a copy of these materials for each student.

BODY OF LESSON

Introduction: The town of Williamsburg is a typical example of a community settled in interior Maine around 1800. While earlier southern Maine towns grew into

prosperous places, communities settled on the edge of the northern Maine wilderness after 1800 faced different challenges.

Activity 1.

Students will read the text and look at the Williamsburg maps, individually or in groups. They will compare the maps, which are of differing resolutions, and find the location of the congruent rivers and roads, noting that one map shows Williamsburg and the surrounding areas and the other shows details of land lots, houses, and their owner's names within the boundaries of Williamsburg. Have students find Moses Greenleaf's home on the State Road, the land he owned at the intersection of West Road and the County Road (likely his original house site), the mill that he built on Bear Creek, the location of the slate quarry, and the location of the homesteads of some of his neighbors. Help students make connections between things on the map and things they have learned in other lessons.

Activity 2.

Students will either write an essay or organize the information they learned into a visual format using "Comic Creator" on www.readwritethink.org, addressing the following themes:

- * inspirations for settling new land
- * hardships suffered upon arriving
- * leadership and its influence on the success or failure of the settlement
- * natural resources available

If students choose the visual option, they should make a 6 square cartoon for the Williamsburg settlement. (Political Satire can be used here if previously introduced to students). (**Knowledge, Comprehension, Application**)

Activity 3.

Students can present essays or comic strips to the class and explain why they chose their particular themes. They should answer the following questions in their presentation:

1. Was Williamsburg well prepared before settling? Why?
2. Did Williamsburg utilize its resources efficiently and without waste?
3. Would you have wanted to be a part of the Williamsburg settlement? Why?

ASSESSMENT

Student demonstrates their understanding of the central concepts of early settlement in Maine, based on the following criteria:

1. Contribution to class discussion
2. Essay or comic strip uses relevant content from the readings/discussion

EXTENSIONS

1. Search for more information about Williamsburg at: history.rays-place.com/me/Williamsburg-me.htm, www.trcmaine.org/community/township.php (scroll down to Williamsburg), and www.visibleblackhistory.com/19th_century.htm, then write an essay about what you learned. **(Knowledge, Comprehension)**

2. Read and review the attached information and map “Popham Settlement 1607” about the Popham settlement, which was inhabited about two centuries before Williamsburg, and write a “Compare and Contrast” essay about the two settlements. **(Analysis, Evaluation, Synthesis)**

Moses Greenleaf and the Maine North Woods, 1806-1834

Moses Greenleaf was born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1777, the son of a successful shipbuilder. In 1790, Moses' father and mother decided to leave the seaport city and move with their children to live on a large farm in New Gloucester in Maine. At age 21, Moses left home and began a career as a storekeeper, but he became fascinated by what we call today the "Maine North Woods." Moses soon came to believe that the huge, untouched territory represented a promising area for settlement. In 1806, when Moses was offered the position of agent for the Massachusetts owner of the township of Williamsburg, in present-day Piscataquis County, he jumped at the chance. He began work immediately and moved his wife and three children there in 1812.

Like Thomas Jefferson, Moses believed that farming was an ideal lifestyle for Americans. Farming kept people close to the land, gave them the satisfaction of producing their own food, allowed them to become self sufficient, and protected them from economic fluctuations. Moses believed that Maine could attract a large proportion of the people in New England who wanted land to farm and to start a new life. Moses did not oppose trade and manufacturing, but believed that agriculture would be the foundation for Maine's prosperity.

Moses understood what needed to be done to bring about the settlement of the North Woods. First, owners of townships had to invest in the towns, surveying the land, and building roads, saw mills, gristmills, and schools. The owners also had to keep the prices of the land low enough so that settlers could afford to purchase it, offer plans to allow them to pay by installments, and create ways for them to earn the cash to pay. The state government needed to build county and state roads to allow the settlers to move about easily, transport goods to market, import needed items, and receive mail.

Moses had not been agent for Williamsburg very long before he discovered the many problems that were hindering the settlement of the North Woods. Land prices were set so high that the majority of settlers could not afford to buy. The majority of non-resident owners of townships were reluctant to invest any money in developing their towns. Other non-resident landowners ran their towns like medieval barons. The state

sold land to individuals for less than what large landowners had paid for it, and were slow in building state and county roads into the interior.

Migration to Maine began to decline as early as 1810, when the federal government imposed embargoes on sales of goods to Britain and France, who were at war and interfering with American trade and shipping. In 1812, Britain and the United States went to war, and Britain attacked Maine shipping and invaded and occupied Eastern Maine. Then in 1816, “the year without a summer,” Maine was struck with cold weather that destroyed crops. As a result of all of these factors, migration of settlers to Maine declined and shifted west to the fertile farm land of the Ohio Valley.

Moses had early understood the need for accurate maps of the North Woods, and he and his brother Eben, who also moved to Williamsburg, had become surveyors. Moses took the data they and other surveyors collected, and turned it into a map, which he published in 1815. The next year, Moses published a geography of Maine, in which he detailed information on geography, climate, and resources. He asked the legislature and the large landowners to take action to turn things around so that settlers would be enticed to move “Down East” rather than out west. He predicted that if nothing was done, settlement might halt forever.

[Information drawn from Walter MacDougall, *Settling the Maine Wilderness: Moses Greenleaf, His Maps, and His Household of Faith, 1777-1834* (Portland, ME: Osher Map Library and the Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine, on behalf of the Osher Library Associates, 2006), especially pages 73-74.]

WILLIAMSBURG SETTLEMENT, 1800-1930

After the American Revolution, thousands of families from Massachusetts moved to the District of Maine, seeking land to farm. Wealthy Massachusetts residents purchased entire townships in Maine hoping to grow richer by selling lots to the families moving downeast.

One of these landowners, or proprietors, was William Dodd, a Boston merchant, who purchased a township of land north of the Piscataquis River, which he named "Williamsburg," after himself. Dodd had no desire to live in the wilderness, so he hired Moses Greenleaf, another ambitious migrant from Massachusetts, to serve as his agent in Williamsburg. Moses accepted Dodd's offer and signed an agreement taking responsibility for meeting the Massachusetts requirements for surveying the township, clearing land, building roads, and attracting settlers. Moses also accepted Dodd's offer of a loan to purchase one-quarter of the land in the town, which he expected to pay off with his share of the profits.

Moses moved his family to a completed house in Williamsburg in December of 1810. A few years later they moved to a new house on Greenleaf Hill, located on the main road to the north. Although Greenleaf did not know it at the time, the great immigration to Maine had already peaked and was starting to decline. With land sales dwindling, Moses had to seek other ways to support his family. He did surveying, but his main source of income came from being appointed Justice of the Peace, and later Associate Justice of the Common Pleas, and finally Justice of the Court of Sessions. These county positions of responsibility generated fees for the services he provided.

Greenleaf's interest soon grew from Williamsburg to the entire District of Maine, because the success of his township depended upon the policies adopted by the Massachusetts legislature for all of Maine. Moses wrote a geography and created a map of Maine which provided the Massachusetts government with the information it needed to implement policies to speed the development of Maine. Moses enlisted the help of his brother Eben to make the explorations and surveys, which provided the data for his first map, published in 1815, and named *Map of the District of Maine from the Latest and Best Authorities, To the Honorable The Legislature of The State of Massachusetts, this Map is Respectfully Inscribed by the Author.*

Moses gathered information on the climate, population, industry, and resources of Maine, which he published along with his recommendations for promoting economic growth in a book named *A Statistical View of the District of Maine; More Especially with Reference to the Value and Importance of its Interior. Addressed to the Consideration of*

the Legislators of Massachusetts, by Moses Greenleaf Esqr. Salus publica mea merces [the public welfare, my reward] in 1816.

Eben moved his family to Williamsburg in 1816 and constructed a house near his brother. One of Moses' long held hopes was that his siblings and their families would join him in Williamsburg to create what he called a "Household of Faith," his vision of an idyllic community. In 1822, Eben wrote to his widowed sister, Mrs. Clarina Jenks, encouraging her to come, and two years later, Clarina moved to Williamsburg with her two grown children, Alley and Elizabeth, and Moses' widowed mother, Lydia Parsons Greenleaf. Alley worked on the farm and Elizabeth found a teaching position.

The arrival of Clarina, Lydia, Alley and Elizabeth coincided with signs of progress in Williamsburg. In 1819, with money William Dodd had lent the town, two one-room schoolhouses, which could also be used for town meetings and church services, were built. In 1820, Williamsburg became a town and had a population of 107. Moses helped organize a Congregational Church, in spite of being an Episcopalian himself. Mail service began in 1821, and regular stagecoach service arrived four years later.

These positive developments could not mask the fact that migration to Maine was dwindling and the overall population of the region was actually decreasing. The federal government's efforts to prevent England and France from interfering with American trade by instituting an embargo, and then the War of 1812, had a major negative impact on the economy. Then landowners demanded that settlers pay for their land or leave. In 1816, "the year without a summer," the cold weather led large numbers of farmers to abandon their Maine land and move to the Ohio Territory, a phenomenon that came to be called "Ohio Fever." Despite the setbacks, Moses believed that the migration to Maine would eventually resume.

In 1825, William Dodd, the proprietor of Williamsburg, died. Moses wrote to one of Dodd's many heirs, urging him to lower his land prices and to provide farmers with seasonal work in the slate quarries so they could pay for their property. But the key to the success of the slate industry would be cheaper transportation to Bangor. Greenleaf had advocated improved transportation as early as 1807, and in 1813, he called for a "great state road" from Bangor to the Canadian border. In 1816, he and another resident were assigned with the responsibility for building a road from Bangor to the last row of townships above Williamsburg. By 1830, Moses began advocating for railroads, and in 1833, the Bangor & Piscataquis Canal & Railroad Company was incorporated, with Moses as President and Eben as Secretary. The population of Williamsburg had reached 227 persons by 1830.

In 1829, Moses published his most important work, *A Survey of the State of Maine in Reference to Its Geographical Features, Statistics and Political Economy*. This book was three times the length of the *Statistical View* and with almost three times the number of tables. Just as in the *Statistical View*, Moses pleaded with the legislature to implement a program to stimulate the Maine economy to halt the exodus of citizens to the West. The same year, Moses also published an *Atlas Accompanying Greenleaf's Map and Statistical Survey of Maine*, which included seven map plates.

In 1833, the residents of the western half of Williamsburg separated and formed the new town of Barnard. The combined population of the two towns reached 284 persons in 1840. In 1833, at age 56, when Moses was at the peak of his career, he contracted typhoid fever on a surveying trip. An effective vaccine would not be developed until 1897, and before that, thousands died of typhoid in the United States. Moses survived the typhoid, but his health was destroyed. On March 20, 1834, he died of erysipelas, an acute streptococcus bacterial infection, the same year that his mother Lydia died at Greenleaf Hill. Ironically, Moses' railroad, the Bangor & Piscataquis, completed a rail link from Bangor to Old Town in 1836, and was later extended to nearby Milo, Foxcroft, and Brownville.

In 1841, Moses' sister Clarina Jenks died at Greenleaf Hill. Moses' son, Moses III continued with his father's map making, publishing a second edition of the *Map of the State of Maine with the Province of New Brunswick* in 1843 and a third edition in 1844. The next year Moses' wife Persis and his brother Eben died, and all of Moses' children left Williamsburg and moved West, as so many Maine people had done during the "Ohio Fever" exodus several decades earlier. In 1850, the combined population of Williamsburg and Barnard stood at 305 persons. Both towns stopped growing at all by 1880, and dwindled to a combined population of 128 in 1930, approximately the same number of residents as in 1820.

[Information for this essay was drawn from the following sources: Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill and Joel W. Eastman *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono, ME: University of Maine Press, 1995); Walter Macdougall, *Settling the Maine Wilderness: Moses Greenleaf, His Maps, and His Household of Faith, 1777-1834* (Portland, ME: Osher Map Library and the Smith Center for Cartographic Education, University of Southern Maine, on behalf of the Osher Library Associates, 2006); Francis R. Wihbey, creator and compiler. *Maine Census Population Totals* (Orono, ME: Fogler Library, 2001), <http://www.library.umaine.edu/census>.

THE POPHAM SETTLEMENT, 1607-1608

In 1605, English sea captain George Weymouth explored the Maine coast looking for valuable resources and a potential site for a settlement. He found a location at the mouth of the Kennebec River near rich fishing grounds that could be exploited. This place was also situated near Indian villages where the English could trade for furs. When he left Maine, he captured five Abenaki Indians near Pemaquid and took them to Plymouth, England. His plan was to teach them English, question them about the area, and then return them to Maine, where they would serve as translators between the English and the Indians. Weymouth placed two of the Indians with the wealthy Sir John Popham, the Lord Justice of England, and three with Sir Ferdinando Gorges, commander of the fort at Plymouth. Both men were excited by Weymouth's report about the area and the information that the Indians shared with them, and they decided to sponsor a colony in Maine. In 1606, Popham and Gorges requested and were given a charter from King James, creating two corporations to colonize America. The London Company would establish a settlement in the south, and the Plymouth Company, one in the north. Soon other wealthy Englishmen joined each of the companies, recruited settlers, purchased supplies, and hired ships.

On December 20, 1606, the London Company sent three ships to Jamestown in Virginia. Sir Ferdinando Gorges apparently took charge of organizing the expedition to Maine, which left on May 31, 1607, aboard the *Gift of God* and the *Mary and John*, to establish a settlement near the Kennebec River. The *Gift of God* was commanded by 54 year old George Popham, the nephew of Sir John Popham, whose was appointed "President" of the Popham Colony, which was named after his uncle. The *Mary and John* was captained by 30 year old Raleigh Gilbert, son of Sir Humphrey Gilbert, another wealthy Englishman, and the nephew of Sir Walter Raleigh, after whom he was named. The expedition was composed of twenty upper class "gentlemen," including a minister and a physician, and 100 common landsmen who knew carpentry, farming, and shipbuilding. Also among the party were two of the captured Native Americans, Skidwarres and Dahanada. When the ships left, Sir John Popham, Sir Ferdinando Gorges and many residents of Plymouth saw them off, and the guns of the fort were fired.

The expedition stopped at the Azores, a group of islands off the coast of Portugal, to take on wood and water. The ships became separated on the crossing, but rendezvoused at St. Georges Island, at an agreed upon meeting spot recommended by Weymouth. On Sunday, August 9, 1607, Reverend Richard Seymour conducted a church

service for the colonists on St. Georges Island. Gilbert then went to Pemaquid to return Skidwarres and Dahanada, hoping to establish good relations with the Indians, but they received a cool reception from the captives' relatives. Surprisingly, they met another of Weymouth's captives, Nahanda, who had been returned by an English ship the year before.

On August 17, the two ships then proceeded to the Kennebec River, and agreed on a site for the settlement on the west side of the mouth of the river. On August 19 the colonists went ashore, and Rev. Seymour held a service of Thanksgiving for their safe arrival in the New World. Next, the royal patent, which outlined the civil government of the colony, was read to all of the settlers, A council would be the governing board and would elect a president for a one year term. The council would appoint officers, act as a jury for trials, and administer punishment.

The next day the landsmen began work on the earthen walls of a fort, and then began building a storehouse into which the stores from the ships were moved when it was finished. The carpenter and shipbuilders began cutting wood for the construction of a small ship to be used by the colony when the other vessels left. On September 5, forty Native American men, women and children, including Skidwarres and Nahanda, arrived for a visit, and were welcomed and entertained by the colonists. Five days later the Native Americans returned for a two-day visit. On September 8, Gilbert went to meet the principal chief at Pemaquid, but the chief had left before Gilbert arrived. While the landsmen were hard at work finishing the fort and building houses, Popham and Gilbert explored the Kennebec and the coast from Cape Elizabeth to the east beyond Pemaquid. The colonists completed the fort on October 8, mounted twelve cannons, and named it St. Georges's Fort. Then the workers built more dwellings and a church. The *Mary and John* left for England and arrived in Plymouth on December 1. Its most important cargo was a report of the voyage to Maine and the construction of the settlement for Gorges and the other investors in the colony. The report described the abundance of fish, trees for ships masts and ribs, hemp for rope, rosin for sealing ships, and grapes for making wine.

When winter arrived on the coast of Maine, the settlers were shocked by how cold it was. They expected the temperature to be like that of England, which was in the same latitude, but England was warmed by the Gulf Stream, while the coast of Maine was cooled by the Labrador Current. Furthermore, North American was experiencing the "Little Ice Age," which lowered temperatures several degrees below what we experience today.

The settlers also created their own problems. A feud developed between supporters of the elderly Popham and the youthful Gilbert. Remarkably, at one point each

side attempted to gain the support of the Abenaki, but the Indians remained very distrustful of the English and were hesitant to trade with them.

Because of the cold, 75 of the settlers decided to return to England on the *Gift of God* in mid-December when it left for England. Only 45 men were left in Maine. When the *Gift of God* arrived in Plymouth on February 7, 1608, the colonists reported that the weather was severely cold, but that everyone's health was excellent. They also described the factions that had developed among the colonists.

Back in Maine, President George Popham, considered old at 54, died on February 5, 1608. He was buried within the walls of the fort, and Gilbert took command. In late winter the storehouse caught fire, destroying many supplies, and some nearby houses also burned. Gorges, however, had already sent two more ships to Maine with supplies. A huge accomplishment was the completion of the *Virginia*, the ship under construction at Popham. It was the first vessel built by the English in the New World. There was no thought of abandoning the settlement at this time

In early September 1680, a third supply ship arrived, delivering the news that Raleigh Gilbert's elder brother had died on July 5. As the heir to the Gilbert estate, Raleigh had to return to England. There was no one else judged capable of administering the colony, and so Gilbert decided to abandon it. The fort was dismantled, the cannons and all supplies were removed and loaded on the ships, and all the colonists left at the end of September and arrived in Plymouth by at the end of November 1608. Sir Ferdinando Gorges was devastated because the abandonment of the colony killed the idea of settling Maine. He wrote that "all our former hopes were frozen to death," because everyone concluded that Maine was too cold to be settled by Englishmen.

[Information for this essay was taken from Henry S. Burrage, *The Beginnings of Colonial Maine* (Portland: Marks Printing Co., 1914), pp. 63-98; and Richard W. Judd, Edwin A. Churchill and Joel W. Eastman, editors, *Maine: The Pine Tree State from Prehistory to the Present* (Orono: University of Maine Press, 1995), pp. 41-45.]

For more information see www.pophamcolony.org and www.archaeologychannel.org/popham.htm



