

THE DOOR OPENS TO PORTSMOUTH EXPANSION

The last decades of the 1600s were tumultuous ones for Portsmouth. Land title problems caused by conflicting political claims in England to the land of the original New Hampshire proprietors and politico-religious differences in the province contributed to instability. The earliest settlers were Anglicans – Ambrose Gibbons, Henry Sherburne and Thomas Walford were among the most prominent. But by 1650, Puritans, including John, Richard and Robert Cutt, dominated Portsmouth. New Hampshire was a part of Massachusetts. The town, as others in New Hampshire, grew slowly through the 1680s. During the 1690s, King William's War accelerated growth in Portsmouth. Major landowners began to subdivide their holdings; refugees from the decimated Maine and interior New Hampshire towns swelled the population, and the market for naval stores supported greater exports.



Warner House (above) is an extravagant brick mansion built in 1716 for Captain Archibald Macphedris. It typifies the era of prosperity ushered in by the 1713 Treaty. The murals (below) commissioned by Archibald Macphedris for his mansion are portraits of Enow Oh Koam and H Nee Yeath Taw, two of the four Mohawks taken to England in 1710 by Peter Schuyler for an appeal to Queen Anne. Attributed to Nehemiah Partridge. While the Mohawk tribes were friendly to the English, there is no record of why Macphedris wanted them portrayed in his stairway.



The Treaty signed with the Wabanaki allowed for resettlement of the interior and profitable trade with the First Nations. Portsmouth, already a hub of mercantile activity, grew rapidly. Merchant families such as Pepperrell, Wentworth, Sherburne, Jaffrey and Rindge took advantage of these opportunities. Newcomer Archibald Macphedris burst on the scene in 1714 with the 350 ton, 24 gun ship Richmond that he loaded with lumber for Lisbon. A letter to Robert Fenwick in Cadiz from Macphedris (September, 1716): "will advise as there are twenty ships here loading for Cadiz and I shall have the opportunity of writing you daily," gives a picture of the busy harbor.

In addition to trade in the traditional products of fish and lumber with the West Indies and Europe, new ventures to develop the resources in the interior were begun. John Wentworth, George Jaffrey, Macphedris and Robert Wilson formed a partnership to operate an iron forge on the Lamprey River. Colonel William Pepperrell began buying land in the deserted towns of Maine. Macphedris and others recruited Irish farmers to help populate both Maine and New Hampshire towns. During this time, New Hampshire was separated from Massachusetts allowing an independence from Boston not enjoyed previously. Although conflict with the First Nations persisted through the 1720s, the balance in the Pisacataqua had turned toward the English, promoting the prosperity that continued for over fifty years.



The c. 1664 Jackson House on Christian Shore was owned by the Puritan Jackson family. Typical of a mid-seventeenth century, prosperous farming family dwelling. (Courtesy: Historic New England)



The c. 1695-1704 Captian Sherburne House is a typical urban house built for John Sherburne, who also owned a house in New Castle. (Courtesy: Strawberry Bank Museum)