

Parkman, Maine, A Frontier Settlement

By VICTOR A. MCKUSICK

Boston dec^r 6 1814

MAJOR Samuel Pingree

I am very glad to hear by your letter of 21 Nov^r. that you had then Nearly Compleated your Survey for locating the Roads in my Township, and by a letter dated dec 2. from Esq Elkins I am Informd the business was finishd and the People was going to work Immediately to make the Roads in the direction in which you had laid them out. I depend on you to see that the roads are well done in the manner I pointed out when I was with you, and that the work is done in as reasonable a manner as Possible, I think it will be better to Contract with men to do it by the mile, and inso doing it will save you a great deal of trouble, for if it is done by the day, you must Attend to the business Constantly or you wont get half a days work from some of them when they will charge for a whole day. You will therefore make the best bargain you can with them to be done by the mile.

I am also glad to hear you are progressing in Erecting your Mills, and that you expected to have them done in good Season. I am sorry you find it necessary to ask for more money. But as I am resolvd to do everything for the encouragement of a good and Substantial Settlement, I will do everything I have promisd & more if it is necessary. I have Inclosd One hundred dollars as I list at the bottom of this letter, which I charge to you and I hope and I depend on your Industry and Oeconomy in Useing it, remembryng that when money once gets out of your hands it will be very difficult to

get it back agan. My principle object is to furnish with the means of makeing A good begining, that you may the Sooner make yourself a good Farm and Encourage others, by your Industry and good Management, to come and Settle around you. dont let anything be wanting on your part to have good Mills and decent roads. you must write me often & let me know how you go on, how many of the New Gloucester young men have Selected their Lots & where have they made their pitch, whether Damet Collins has made any Clearing. You wont fail to give an Account of all the Settlers with a Certificate Signd by yourself and Esquire Elkins, so that I may make a Settlement with the Legislature at their Session in January. If there is more than forty so much the better, & also Inform me if you have sold any Land since I came away, to whom & what Lots they have taken

I wish for A plan of the Roads as you have laid them out, marking the kind of land they go over, & how much will want poleing. you must Stir up the adjoining Towns to make roads to meet ours, especially from Harmony.

The name which our Town now goes by (Number five in Sixth Range) Appears to be too long to be very familiar with, and therefore if it is the wish of the Settlers to call it Parkman, I have no objection, but you must not let it be known that the Suggestion comes from me, but the thing must Originate with you. I am your friend & Hum[ble] Ser[vant]

[signed] Samuel Parkman

1 Bill Hallowell & Augusta	10
12 do. 5 each	60
6 do. 5 each Waterville	30
	\$100

This letter, written by Samuel Parkman, Boston merchant who owned the township in Maine which now bears his name, to Samuel Pingree, his resident agent for the development of this township, opens a window upon a long-past era of frontier settlement in New England. Further research reveals much information concerning both the town itself and the men who were the chief actors in its story.¹

Samuel Parkman (Fig. 1) lived from 1751 to 1824. He was one of sixteen children of the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman of Westboro, near Worcester, Massachusetts, and was a fifth-generation descendant of an Elias Parkman who settled in Dorchester in 1633.

Samuel Parkman went up to Boston at the age of thirteen determined to make a fortune and proceeded to make good his resolution. He started as errand boy in a tavern, the Bunch of Grapes. He later established a store on Merchants Row which did both retail and wholesale business. From the character of the merchandise handled one concludes that it corresponded to the department store of today. Immediately after the American Revolution he became very active in import-export business. Ships were fitted out with cargoes of indigo, tar, turpentine, masts, timber, etc. and sent to China.

¹ Much information was gathered from the Deed Office of Piscataquis County, Dover-Foxcroft, Me.; the Maine Historical Society, Portland; the Boston Athenaeum; and the Massachusetts Historical Society. Mrs. John Forbes Perkins (Mary Coolidge Perkins) of Milton, Mass., descendant of Samuel Parkman was also helpful.

On return passage the products of that country were brought here for sale.

Sound business sense is displayed by the letter to Pingree. There is an anecdote which is also illuminating. Parkman owned a number of houses in Boston and rented them. One day one of his tenants came to the store, made some purchases, and then asked, "Who can I get to carry these up?" Parkman, unseen in another part of the store, called, "I will carry them up." After closing time Parkman took the packages and carried them to the house of the tenant who was much embarrassed to find who the errand boy was. Parkman's comment in handing over the parcels was, "When I started in the world, I did my own lugging."

Parkman had eleven children. His daughters married sons of other merchants: Robert Gould Shaw, Nathaniel Russell Sturgis, Joseph and Edward Tuckerman, Edward Blake. Through his daughters Parkman is ancestor of several of Boston's first families. His son Francis Parkman (1788-1852) was a prominent Boston clergyman (New North Church) and his son Francis (1823-1893) was the famous historian of the French and Indian civilization in America. Another son, Dr. George Parkman, posthumously became widely known in an unhappy way. He was murdered in 1849 by Dr. John White Webster, Professor of Chemistry in Harvard Medical School. The trial is a famous one in American legal history.

Gilbert Stuart painted Parkman at least once and his wife twice. In addition Samuel Parkman commissioned Stuart to paint the famous Washington at Dorchester Heights. Stuart completed this painting in nine days (in 1806) and was paid \$600 for it. Parkman presented it to the City of Boston. It hung for many years in Faneuil Hall and now is on view

in the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. There is a story, possibly apocryphal, that Parkman was forced into this charity somewhat against his will. According to one version he had acquired a large canvas of the same subject, painted by an unknown artist, in a shipment of miscellaneous goods from the West Indies. Despairing of any financial return from this picture, he decided to give it to the City. The populace, always ready to seize on points for criticism of Federalists such as Parkman, set up a great hue and cry, insisting that the painting did not do patriotic or artistic justice to its subject and that Parkman was well able to pay for one that did. Suspicions have been expressed that Stuart, not always in political sympathy with the persons from whom he derived his livelihood, was himself the inventor of this anecdote.

Other significant gifts included a church bell, cast by Paul Revere, given by Parkman to the church in Westboro, Massachusetts. This bell now hangs in the belfry of the Westboro Baptist Church. In 1814 he also deeded the entire township which is now Willimantic, Maine, to Harvard College for endowing a Chair of Theology (of which more later). On the basis of his estate, valued at half a million dollars at the time of his death, Parkman's sons and grandsons made a number of outstanding philanthropic bequests. The son, Dr. George Parkman, established at Harvard Medical School the Parkman Professorship of Anatomy of which Oliver Wendell Holmes was the first incumbent for some 35 years. As a result of growth of the fortune through successful investment, a grandson, George Francis Parkman, son of Dr. George, was able early in this century to leave five million dollars to the City of Boston for improvement and

maintenance of the Boston Common and other parks. The historian grandson, because of the inheritance from Samuel Parkman, was placed in a position permitting him in spite of physical semi-invalidism to pursue the studies which resulted in his magnificent histories.

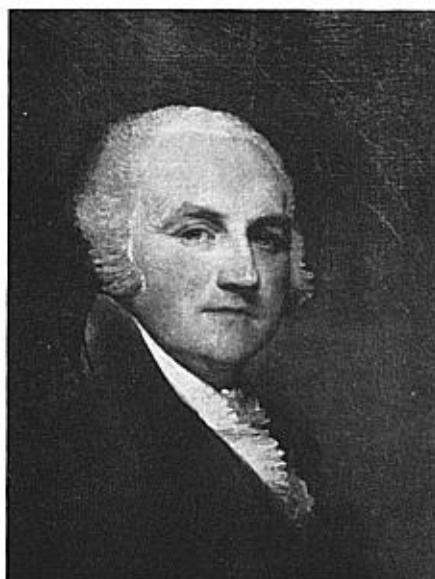


FIG. I. SAMUEL PARKMAN BY
GILBERT STUART, ABOUT 1807
Owned by Mr. John T. Coolidge.

For 23 years Parkman was deacon of the New North Church in Boston. He is buried in the old King's Chapel Burial Ground where he was one of the last to join the illustrious company of Governor Winthrop and others.

Samuel Pingree (1770-1840) was a fifth-generation descendant of Moses Pengry who settled in Ipswich between 1635 and 1640, and was born in Methuen. At the age of fifteen he was sent to Saco, Maine, then called Pepperel-

borough, to learn the hatter's trade from Phineas Kelly. In Saco he met Susanna Warren whom he married. For a time they lived in Portland but in 1794 they settled in New Gloucester, 22 miles north of Portland, where for 20 years Pingree followed the trade of hatter and in addition ran an inn.

In 1814 Pingree moved to the present township of Parkman having been engaged by Parkman as his agent in the settling of that town. He settled in the part of the town now known as Pingree Center and established a gristmill and sawmill there as well as a hat factory. The grist and sawmills did not prosper because of the poor water supply. Samuel Pingree did not purchase the lot at Pingree Center until 1816. His son Samuel, Jr., purchased a lot, as indicated by the map, with the original purchasers of 1814.

In New Gloucester, Cumberland County, Pingree had been a Justice of the Peace. When moving to Parkman, which was then in Somerset County (incorporated in 1809) he again became a Justice of the Peace. He belonged to the Masonic Lodge in New Gloucester where his Masonic diploma, a particularly early one, hangs in the lodge room today. His activities in the militia are indicated by the form of salutation Parkman used in his letter. In his *History of Piscataquis County* (1880), which now includes Parkman's original township, A. Loring states that Pingree "was oft resorted to as a magistrate, but not being in political sympathy with the majority of his townsmen, he was not often honored with the fruits of their suffrage."

The Pingrees had nine children. Samuel, Jr., was born in Portland in 1793. Hannah, Charlotte, Moses, Michael, Susannah, Catharine and Sarah Jane Gray were born in New Gloucester. One son was born in Parkman on August 5,

1817, and was appropriately christened Parkman Pingree. Pingree himself is said to have died of apoplexy. He is buried in the yard of the Parkman Baptist Church.

The township of Parkman, Maine, is located within 20 miles of the geographic center of the state. It is roughly equidistant from both Bangor and Waterville, 50 miles away, occupying the northern apex of an equilateral triangle. The divide between the watersheds of the Kennebec and Penobscot Rivers passes through the township. The foot of Moosehead Lake, at Greenville, is less than 30 miles away and Mount Katahdin is visible from the town on a clear day.

Township number five, range six, later to be Parkman, was purchased first from the General Court of Massachusetts in 1794 by Andrew Craigie, a speculator who lived in the house which Longfellow subsequently occupied and which is known as the Craigie house.² Craigie defaulted in getting the number of settlers—forty families in eight years—established by the terms of the sale. In addition, he was in financial difficulties by 1800 and could not make a monetary settlement in lieu of settlers.

Samuel Parkman then purchased the township in 1804 paying \$7,285 for almost 27,000 acres—about 27 cents per acre. In 1807 he had Stephen Weston survey the town and lay it out in 200-acre lots. He then advertised it on these terms: Forty lots of 100 acres each at \$1 per acre; thereafter, \$2 per acre or more. A few settlers may have been there already in 1807. At any rate, by September,

² Craigie had a dozen irons in the fire at once. He formed a company to develop Boston Harbor and built the "New Bridge" from Cambridge to Boston. With the slump that accompanied and followed the War of 1812 he became bankrupt and died hopelessly in debt.

1814, Parkman had engaged Pingree as agent and was prepared for serious efforts to settle the town.

On September 10, 12, and 13 of 1814 (the 11th was presumably the Sabbath), Parkman was in his township and the settlers, 25 in all, who had already "made their pitch" and were interested in purchasing lots were on hand to do so, giving mortgages in most instances. Stage-coach service from Boston was extended as far as Augusta by 1806³ and may have reached Waterville or some closer point by 1814; whatever the situation one can be certain that the trip into Maine was an arduous one for Parkman.

The transactions mentioned above were conducted before Samuel Elkins, Esq., since Samuel Pingree had not yet established residence in Somerset County which would have qualified him to be a Justice of the Peace. Squire Elkins was an early settler of Dexter, an adjoining township, which was called Elkinstown for a time.

The 25 purchasers of 1814 were the Founding Fathers. The original sale of the township to Parkman in 1804 was "on the condition that the said Parkman his heirs or assigns shall grant & convey to each settler in said township who settled therein before the first day of January seventeen hundred & eighty four, or in case of his decease without assignment, then to his heirs, & in the case of assignment then to the assigns, one hundred acres to be so laid out as to best include the improvements of the settler & to be least injurious to the adjoining lands." There is no evidence that any settler qualified.

Samuel Parkman again visited his township in 1816 and again transacted

considerable business in land sales. These two were his only visits. By the time of the second visit Parkman's hint of 1814 had taken effect and the township was known as Parkman Plantation. Eighteen sixteen was a cold year in northern New England. Five inches of snow fell May 29 and 30; snow squalls occurred between June 6 and 10; six inches of snow fell on October 6; there was frost each morning through the summer. No corn was grown and terrible poverty prevailed. The wildcats and foxes did damage to livestock and were feared by the settlers. In that year 15,000 persons are said to have left Maine.⁴ It must have required much courage on the part of the settlers to assume obligations for their land at such a time. By 1820 the population of Parkman was 255 and the town was incorporated in 1822.

Members of the Parkman family sold the last of their land in Parkman about 1858. Visits by members of the family concerned with overseeing the holdings are also on record. In 1848 Francis Parkman on one of his trips into the Maine woods spent a night at Sangerville, a town adjoining Parkman, and described the Moosehorns, a road-fork landmark which has long been familiar to travelers to Moosehead and is located not over 10 miles from Parkman. However, in his journal, the historian makes no reference to the two neighboring townships in which his grandfather had played an important role. The sanctimonious Loring, in his *History*, records that another grandson, a lawyer, retired to Parkman for two years in the 1850's to recover from the inroads of alcoholism upon his health.

There is another town of Parkman—

³ Abbott, J. S. C. and Elwell, E. H., *The History of Maine* (Augusta [Me.]: E. E. Knowles, 1892).

⁴ Smith, M. J., *A History of Maine from Wilderness to Statehood* (Portland: Falmouth Publishing House, 1949).

in Ohio—founded by, and named for a nephew of Samuel Parkman. In the Boston Athenæum is preserved a bound notebook inscribed “this book the property of Samuel Parkman of Boston.” These words and the genealogical details re-

York, of them were born at Parkman, New Connecticut,” etc., etc.

The map (Fig. 2) indicates the site of the lots purchased by the following twenty-five persons in September, 1814:

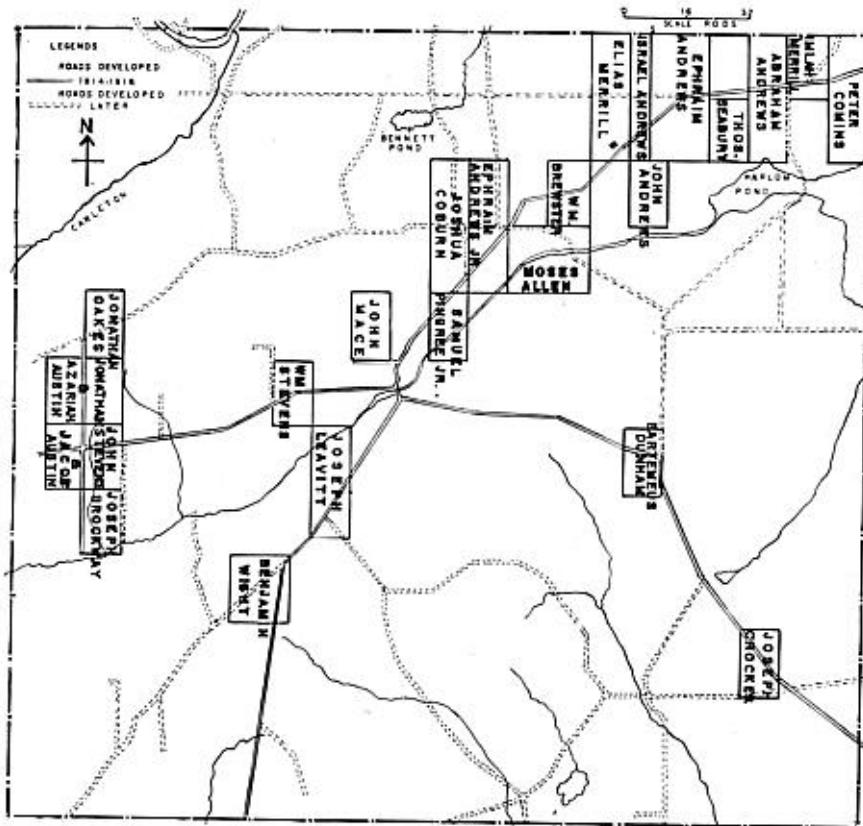


FIG. 2. LOCATION OF LOTS INVOLVED IN THE PURCHASES OF 1814

corded in the book are in Samuel Parkman's own hand, familiar from the letter to Pingree. In it he states: “Robert Breck Parkman son of my brother Alexander Parkman was born May 21 1771 was Married May 29 1803 to Miss Lucy Phelps of Scipio, in the State of New

Moses Allen; Abraham, Ephraim, Ephraim, Jr., Israel, and John Andrews; Azariah, Jacob, and Jonathon Austin; William Brewster; Joseph Brockway; Joshua Coburn; Peter Comins; Joseph Crocker; Bartimeus Dunham; Joseph Leavitt; John Mace; Elias and Imlah

Merrill; Jonathon Oakes; Samuel Pingree, Jr.; Thomas Seabury; John and William Stevens; and Benjamin Wight.

Pingree cannot be considered a significant influence in the initial settling. The majority of the settlers had come from Greene, Maine (seven miles northeast of Auburn), under the leadership of Peter Comins in particular. It is difficult to understand why Parkman did not engage one of these Greene men as his agent. Possibly he wished a more disinterested party.

Peter Comins, son of Deacon Lemuel Comins, a first settler of Greene in 1776, married Sally Andrews of Greene in October, 1806, and they may have moved to Parkman the following spring. He came from a pious family and was a prime mover in the founding in 1818 of the Parkman Baptist Church of which he was one of the two first deacons. Two of his sons, who spelled their name "Cummings," were educated as clergymen.⁵

Joshua Coburn, born 1771, was son of William Coburn of Dracut, Massachusetts, who answered the call of April 19, 1775, as a "minute man" and fought later in the battles of the Revolution. William moved to Greene in 1783. Joshua Coburn and Mary Comins were married in August, 1810, and probably moved to Parkman soon thereafter. Joshua was the second original deacon of the Parkman Baptist Church.

William Brewster (1786-1851) was an eighth-generation descendant of his famous namesake who came over on the *Mayflower* in 1620. He is the great-grandfather of former Senator Ralph Owen Brewster of Maine. William

Brewster settled with his father in South Leeds near Greene, married Christina Briggs in June, 1809, and probably moved to Parkman soon after. He was first clerk of the Parkman Baptist Church, selectman when the town was incorporated, and in general maintained the record of public service which has distinguished the entire line.

Thomas Stevens married Abigail Brown in Greene in March, 1812, and a William Stevens married Betsey Jackson in Greene in December, 1805. These are presumably the Stevenses of the original purchase group. Moses Allen, the Merrills, and the Austins may have been from Greene. Elias Merrill may have erected the first frame dwelling in town. Almost certainly his house is the earliest still standing. In the unfinished house of Elias Merrill, Elder Zenas Hall, pastor of the Parkman Baptist Church from 1818 to 1845, was ordained on January 14, 1819. The house is now occupied by Mr. Carroll L. McKusick. The settlers usually lived in log houses until sawmill facilities became available. The second oldest frame building in town appears to be the Parkman Baptist Church, which was built in 1832 and is the second oldest meetinghouse in the present Piscataquis County.

Andrews was a family name in Greene. However, Ephraim Andrews, a veteran of the American Revolution, and the other purchasers by the name of Andrews seem to have come from elsewhere at a fairly early date.

John Mace was from New Gloucester. He married Samuel Pingree's daughter Hannah the following spring, April 24, 1815. In 1839 the family moved from Parkman to Ohio and in 1836 to Pittsfield, Pike County, Illinois. They had nine children. John Mace with sons John

⁵ Mower, W. L., *History of the Town of Greene, Androscoggin County, Maine, 1775 to 1900 with Some Matter Extending to a Later Date* (1938).

and Michael went to California in the Gold Rush of 1849. The father died after one month; the sons remained in California about three years.

Jonathon Oakes was presumably a son of Captain Jonathon Oakes who owned and settled much of the present Canaan and Skowhegan. He is therefore a relative but not a direct ancestor of Sir Harry Oakes.

The origins of the others are obscure to the writer.

The settlers were general farmers and woodsmen. A number of ancillary trades necessary to the self-contained economy were represented. For example, Abraham Andrews was a wheelwright. Samuel Pingree we have already heard about.

It is worthwhile pointing out that Maine was still part of Massachusetts in 1814. The War of 1812 was not yet over. In fact that very summer the British had occupied Castine and then Bangor, causing fears of harassment in the back country and of British-inspired uprisings of the Penobscot Indians. James Madison, fourth President, was still in office. The population of the District of Maine, as it was called, had been only 228,687 in the census of 1810, and the overwhelming majority of that figure was concentrated in the southern part of the state. Napoleon had not yet met his Waterloo (1815). Aged George III ("America's last king") was still on the throne of England. In the census of

1810, there were only 17 states in the Union and the total population (states and territories) was about 7.2 million.

In 1804, at the same time he bought Number 5 in range 6, Parkman also bought Number 8 in range 8, the present Willimantic. For some reason he paid slightly more (\$7,490.26) for this smaller township of 23,000 acres. By 1814 not a single settler had "made a pitch" in Willimantic, which was not readily accessible either from Skowhegan and Waterville or up the Piscataquis River. In February, 1814, probably to avoid a monetary settlement with the General Court, Parkman deeded the township "lock, stock and barrel" to Harvard College to support a professor of theology. At the time of the deeding, the township was evaluated at \$20,000.

In 1826, two years after Parkman's death, Harvard College sold the township to Aquilla Davis of New Hampshire for \$2,700, about one third of what Parkman paid for it. The deed was signed by the Reverend John T. Kirkland, then President of Harvard. Doubtless, Parkman would have been much distressed had he known of this course of events. Samuel's son, the Reverend Francis Parkman, subsequently supplemented the original bequest so that at long last the Parkman Professorship of Pulpit Eloquence and Pastoral Care in the Harvard School of Theology was established in 1840.