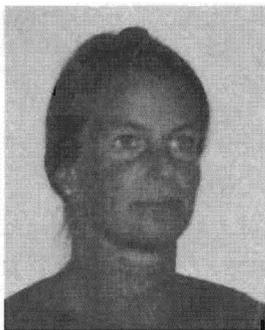


A History of Canaan



By MARGO TAUSSIG MORAN

Mrs. Moran is a decendent of the first land grantee of Canaan, Thomas Miner. She is a free-lance photographer and works as a substitute for the area schools. She is a member of the Canaan Historical Museum Committee, the Upper Valley-Lake Sunapee Council, and the New Hampshire Regional Planning Commission. She and her two daughters are the sixth and the seventh generation to live in the home built by their ancestors.

The July 9, 1761 Canaan charter from Benning Wentworth, the Royal Governor of New Hampshire, states that there were sixty-eight grantees (62 men and six

societies) most of whom lived in or near Norwich, Connecticut. The records show that apparently only about a dozen original grantees came to their land. They were: Amos Walworth, Ebeneazer Eames, George and Daniel Harris, Samuel Meacham, Thomas Gates, Thomas Miner, James Jones, Samuel Dodge, Ephraim Wells, Jr., Josiah Gates, and possibly Thomas Gustin.

There is evidence that before the town was settled, it was hunted by the Abnaki Indians, part of the Algonquian tribe. Stone axes, jugs, and arrowheads have been unearthed at old campsites near the outlet of Goose Pond and on the west shore of Hart Pond. The area was also popular with trappers from Haverhill, Massachusetts, one of whom gave Hart Pond its name.

In 1763, a path was cut along the east side of the Connecticut River from Old Fort Number 4 in Charlestown to what is now West Lebanon, thus making the grants more accessible. Settlers began to move north into this area. A combination of records and stories tell of the first two inhabitants of Canaan.

Thomas Miner was named a grantee at the age of 18. Not much of a scholar, he went to sea for three years and saved

enough money to be independent. In 1766, at age 23 with a wife and young baby, he felt the restraints of the Connecticut blue laws and decided to explore his land in New Hampshire. As Wallace's *History of Canaan, N.H.* says, "He had explored the ocean whose waste of waters left no trace behind. Now he would explore the land and leave trace of himself that should make him famous in local story." He tried to get other grantees to do the same, and meeting George Harris, another grantee, one day, he was reputed to have said, "Mr. Harris, I've got tired of this humdrum sort of life in a village (Norwich). I'm going out er this and try the bears and wolves for neighbors and live on fish and venison. Come along and let's look after our six miles square." Harris persuaded Miner to wait until the following spring when several families would be prepared and they would be able to defend and support one another. And so Miner waited.

Meanwhile, John Scofield with his wife, two sons, and two daughters had left Connecticut in the spring of 1766 in search of a home in Canada where it wouldn't be overcrowded with people. When they reached the confluence of the White and Connecticut Rivers, they



Above: Looking east on Main Street at the intersection of Canaan Street in Canaan Village, a year or two before the Great Fire of 1923 which destroyed all the buildings shown here.

Left: An 1890 view from the Meeting House tower of Broad Street, now known as Canaan Street, with the old Methodist Church on the right.

found a few settlers and passing trappers and woodsmen. From them, Scofield heard of the "rich intervals, huge trees, and game in abundance to be had in the wilderness where as yet no man had settled for a longer time than was needed to take up his traps." Intrigued by the prospects, he set off for Canaan on snowshoes with his family and a handsled of provisions. Some fourteen miles later, as the sun was setting, they crossed the frozen Mascoma River near what is now South Road in West Canaan. Scofield found a sheltered spot, built a large fire, cleared away the snow, and made a rude shelter out of brush and bark.

This first cover marked the beginning of Canaan's permanent settlement. The following spring, in 1767, Thomas Miner found that the other grantees still weren't ready to head north, so with his wife and son, horse and cow, he came without them. Their first night in Canaan must have been much like the Scofield's, though warmer. The next morning, however, the horse ran away and Miner retraced his steps to Fort Number Four where a man they had talked to a few days before had the horse tethered. When

the horse and its owner returned to Canaan, Elinor Miner reported that she thought she had heard someone chopping wood and possibly the sound of a gun in the adjoining valley. The following day, Thomas went off cautiously to investigate. When he too heard an ax, he fired his gun and heard an answering report. Thus John Scofield and Thomas Miner met and became life-long friends.

Late that summer, more grantees arrived—George and Daniel Harris, Amos Walworth, Samuel Benedict, Samuel Jones, Lewis Joslyn, Asa Williams, Joseph Crow, and Daniel and David Crossman.

George Harris was recognized as a leader, and he soon had exploring parties organized so that everyone could select sites for their new homes. Most were built in the South Road vicinity, with a few a little south of the center of town. Stories say that on one of these explorations, Harris and his party shot a goose by a pond abound with them. They roasted the goose over the fire and were looking forward to a most succulent meal only to find that the bird was so tough that it was nearly impossible to chew. In its memory,

they named the lake Goose Pond.

Life in the beginning of Canaan was very hard. Land had to be cleared and tilled. An old New Hampshire history described the land as follows: "There is hardly a square rod...without enough stones in it to build a four-foot wall around it." Times certainly haven't changed! There weren't any saw mills, therefore corn and grain had to be transported to Lebanon to be ground. All members of the family had to work together long hours to eke out a living,



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An aerial view, looking south from above Back Bay Road, of Cardigan Mountain School and Canaan Street Lake. Founded in 1945, the boarding school is for boys from all over the country — grades six through nine — with an enrollment of 178 last year and a teaching staff of 35.



The Old Grist Mill, Canaan, N. H.

A reproduction of a 1910 postcard showing an old grist mill on Indian River at the foot of Grist Mill Road. It was destroyed in the Hurricane of 1938.

and even then, food was scarce. The first death recorded was in the winter of 1768. Joseph Crow's child was buried in what is now Canaan Street Cemetery.

It was a relief when Ebenezer Eames built the first corn mill in 1771. He located it at the "Corner" on the outlet stream of Hart Pond and powered it with an overshot water wheel. Three years

later, Thomas Miner put up the first saw mill on Moose Brook. Roads were constructed between houses and the mills; additional mills were built both in Factory Village (Canaan Center) and on Goose Pond; and the town began to grow.

Canaan was one of the towns east of the Connecticut River that united with

Vermont in 1778 when that colony petitioned Congress to be admitted to statehood. Since New Hampshire did not recognize the right of succession, Vermont was admitted to the Union on the condition that it relinquished all claim to grants east of the west bank of the river. Thus, Canaan and the other towns remained a part of New Hampshire.



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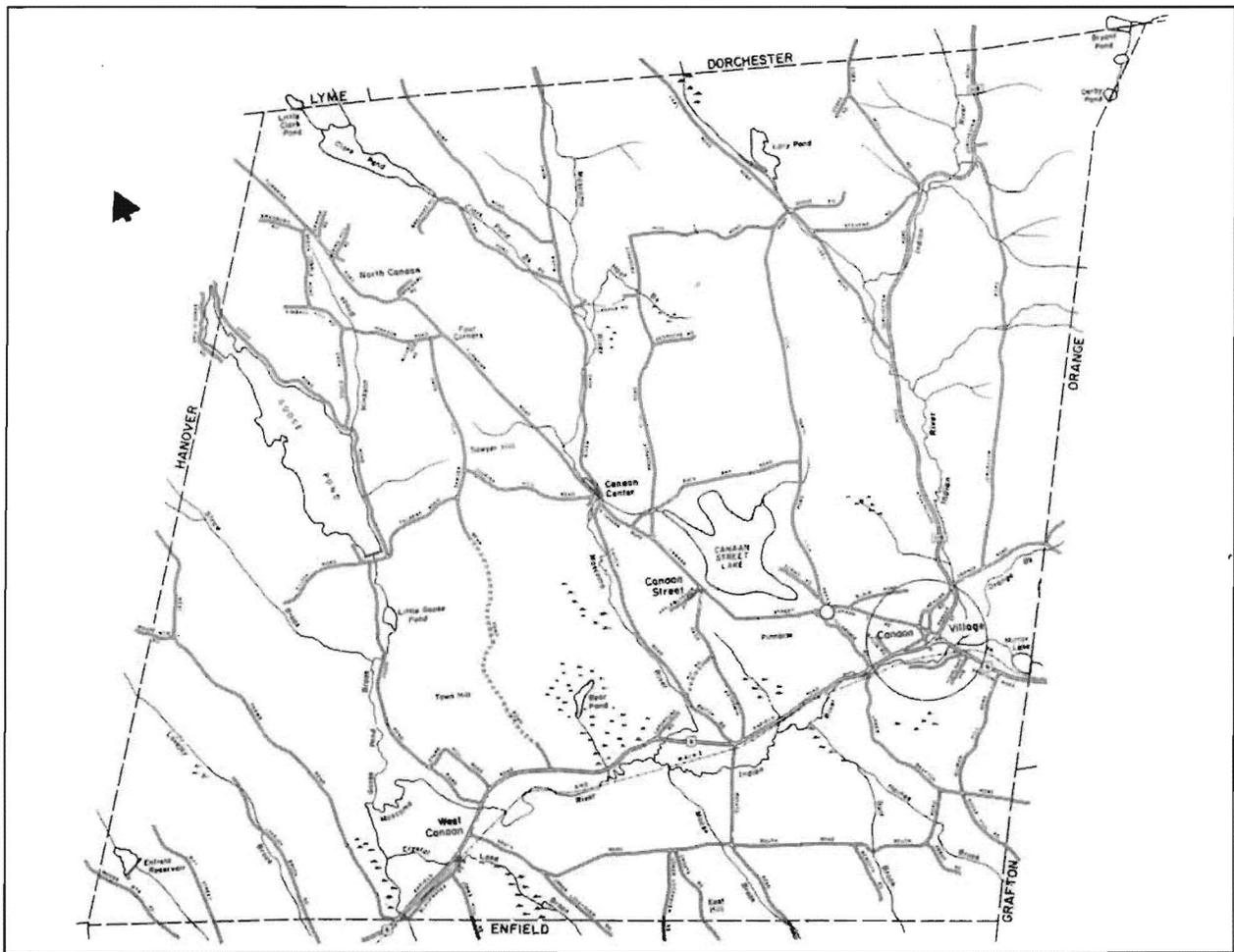
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A 1970 map showing all the roads and the towns bordering Canaan.

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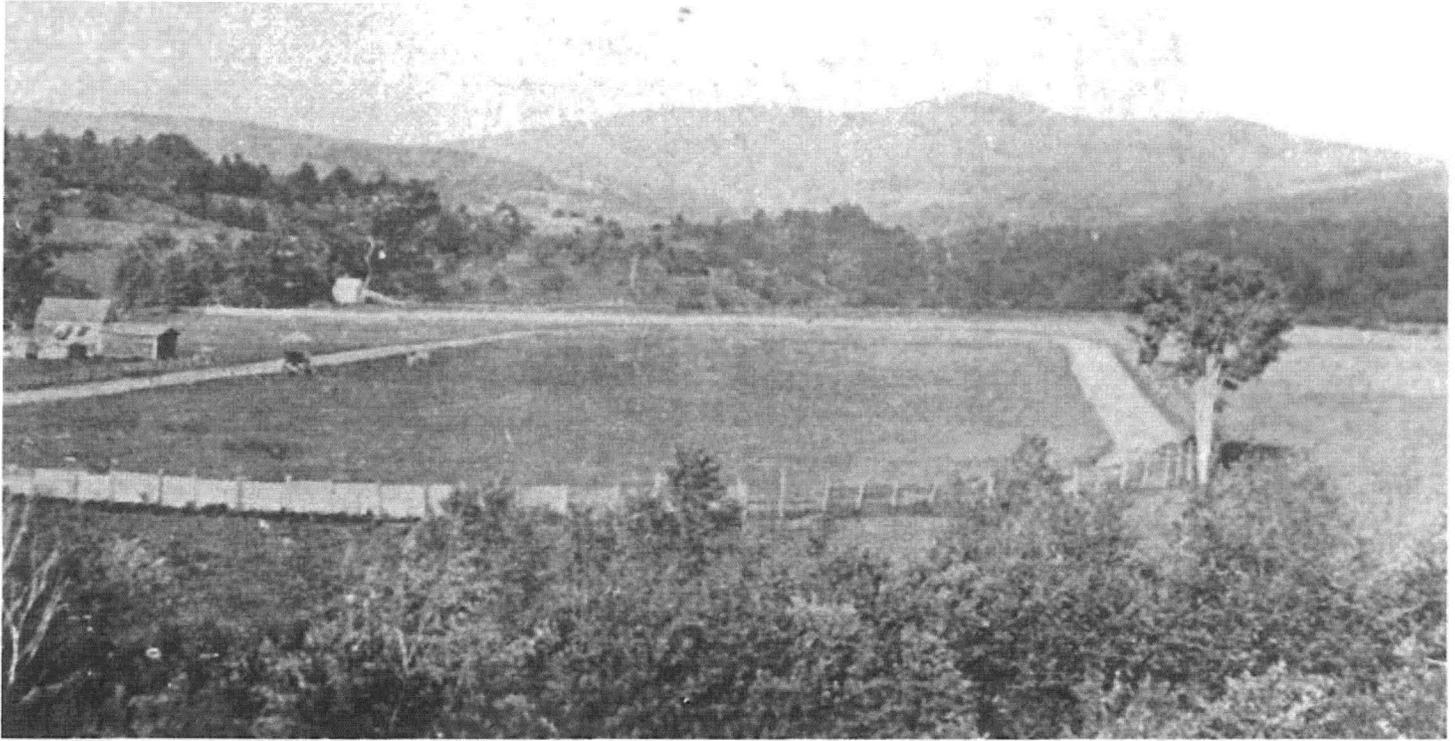
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The site of The Canaan Fair prior to its beginning in 1897 when it was used for over thirty years to hold horse races and was part of the Carey Smith farm.

Ten years later, in 1788, Broad Street was laid out on the west side of Hart Pond. Known today as Canaan Street and part of the first historic district in New Hampshire, it was originally ninety-nine feet wide and ran through frog swamps and bushes for nearly a mile. William Douglass was the only settler at the time on the Street. He had built his log cabin near the present Old Meeting House a few years before. He also planted the first apple orchard in town. Later, his cabin was used as a school house for District Number One.

As saw mills sprang up, settlers built large frame houses, many of which still stand. The Meeting House followed in 1796, along with many other buildings. In fact, Broad Street was lined with businesses—law offices, shops, blacksmith shops, a doctor's office—which is why some people still refer to it as Canaan Street Village.

Churches also flourished. The Baptists were the first and strongest for some years. They were originally led by Thomas Baldwin of later Baptist fame who left in 1790. They worshipped in the Meeting House, but after Elder Joseph Wheat died in 1836, the church membership on the Street declined and wasn't revived until recently.

In 1806, the New England Methodist Conference met in Canaan and attracted many new members. In 1826, a Methodist church was built on the corner of Potato and South Roads that housed a membership of nearly one hundred. In 1844, another Methodist church was constructed on Broad Street, and most of the membership gradually transferred to it. Sixteen years later, Phinias Eastman bought the old church building and moved it to the village near the railroad. West Canaan also has a church which is still in use and which is reputedly

the smallest church building in New England.

Other smaller congregations were organized and later abandoned—the Free-will Baptist Society, the Advent Church and the Congregational Church whose “memorial” is the Old North Church.

The Catholic faith had its beginnings in Canaan in the 1850's when mass was celebrated in private homes, usually those of Robert Dwyre, Lewis Giguere, or William Barry. Thirty years later, they laid plans for a church which was built in 1890 on the site of the present building.

Grafton was the site of religious services held at El Nathan. Similarly, in 1916, the Union Mission was formed in Canaan Center with a chapel erected three years later when the El Nathan group joined them and renamed themselves the Mehida Pentecostal Assembly. They joined with the Assemblies of God in June of 1920 and moved several



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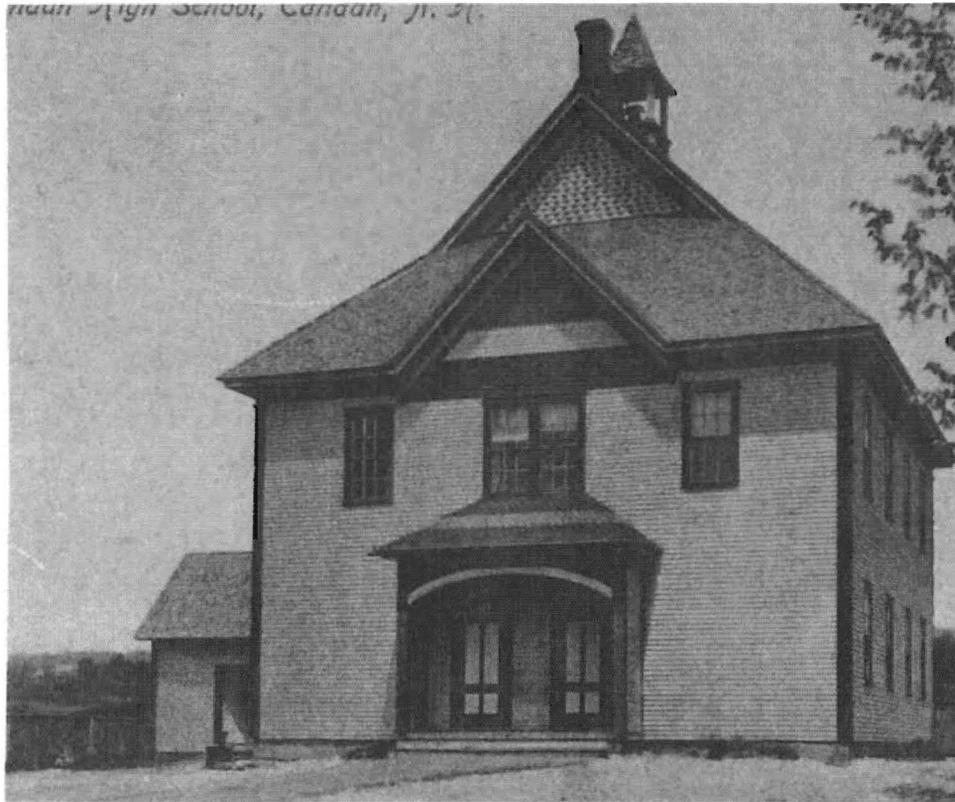
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The Canaan School on School Street in Canaan Village, located on what is now the playground of today's grade school, cared for all the students of Canaan prior to being torn down in 1964. Today's budget, just for Canaan students, for the year 1983-84 is \$849,232 in local property taxes paid to the Mascoma Valley Regional School District.

decades later to their current location downtown.

Canaan has transformed over the years from a town with many small mills, thriving sheep flocks, businesses, and farms to a town whose inhabitants find work mostly outside the town. This is not to say that there aren't successful businesses still in town—quite the contrary, Canaan boasts at least five grocery stores, two lumber mills, a hardware store, glass blowers, paddle makers, a designer of post and beam structures (including one that was displayed on Boston Common in that city's tricentennial year), a sugary, a lumber supply company, a blacksmith, in addition to numerous other successful private enterprises.

Dominated by handsome Mount Cardigan, Canaan still has acres upon acres of untouched land where fish and game abound. For the most part, the lakes, ponds, and streams are still clear. In fact, the Crystal Lake Water Company, incorporated in 1889, still pipes water to the town from Canaan Street Lake. There are many back roads that you can travel without meeting anyone, and there is even a quaking bog full of duck weed, sphagnum, and pitcher plants. Canaan has been the site of the Canaan Fair for many decades as well as many races put on by the Lions Club. CRREL spent two winters on Canaan Street Lake studying the effects of ice on the shoreline.

Citizens and visitors in Canaan enjoy many types of recreation. The lakes provide ice fishing, cross country skiing, ice boating, and skating in the winter as well as many water sports in the summer. There are musical events, square dancing, programs put on by the elementary school, as well as programs put on for the senior citizens. The 4-H and Girl and Boy Scouts are active and participate in all the parades along with members of numerous other groups and societies.

In many ways, we are returning to the ways of our forefathers. People band together to get a job done, whether it be a barn raising, or trying to cope after the elementary school burned in 1980. In cold weather, there is again the marvelous aroma of wood fires burning, as people try to lower the cost of heating their homes.

Many inhabitants are regaining interest in Canaan's heritage. There are a wealth of historic buildings to see, and a museum full of early inventions, tools, and household goods which will be reopening this spring. There are even plans for a street fair to mark the tenth anniversary of the Historic District.

All in all, Canaan is a community where age does not define friendship and people still take time to stop and chat when they meet in the course of their busy day. ■

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