

1 THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BACKGROUND

In the southwest corner of New Hampshire there is a hilly, rocky, heavily forested region known to geographers as the "Monadnock Highlands."¹ It is anchored to the south by solitary Mount Monadnock. The valleys of the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers form its eastern and western limits. To the north rise the White Mountains. The rough surface of the land provides many bowls that hold ponds or lakes.² The soil is in general thinner and poorer than in the river valleys, but there is considerable variation even within a small area. The climate is an important feature of the region: summers are cool and relatively short; winters begin sooner, last longer, and are more severe than in the lowlands.³

Several miles north of Mount Monadnock, spread along the banks of two ponds and the tumbling stream connecting them, lies Harrisville. This small mill village grew up without regard for political lines and divisions. For nearly a century before it finally set up on its own, the settlement lay astride the boundary between the towns of Nelson to the north and Dublin to the south. The decisive influence in its origin and history has been its geography, and particularly its remarkable supply of waterpower.

The source of this waterpower consists of about ten square miles of drainage area, which includes a chain of three large ponds plus three smaller tributary ponds and intervening meadow land, all available for use as storage reservoirs. The first in the chain is Spoonwood Pond, which lies in the town of Nelson at an elevation of 1,385 feet above sea level and covers 170 acres with a drawable depth of about 12 feet of water. The second and largest lies in the towns of Nelson and Hancock and is known as Long Pond or Lake Nubanusit. Just to the south of Spoonwood, Long Pond lies at an elevation of 1,365 feet and covers about 800 acres with an available storage depth of about 12 feet. The water from these two ponds drains across a mile and a half of meadowland and empties into Harrisville Pond,⁴ which lies at an altitude of 1,320 feet and covers about 120 acres.⁵ The water from these three ponds then runs off into Goose Brook,

1 Margery D. Howarth, *New Hampshire, A Study of Its Cities and Towns in Relation to Their Physical Background*, p. 8.

2 Cf. Katherine F. Billings, *The Geology of the Monadnock Quadrangle, New Hampshire*.

3 Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

4 This pond has been known successively as Brackshin Pond, Twitchell's Pond, Upper Pond, Harrisville Pond, and, most recently and most regrettably, Lake Nubaunsit.

5 John Humphrey, *Water Power of Nubanusit Lake and River*, pp. 1-2. (The name of the lake is generally spelled "Nubanusit," and this spelling will be used in this account.)

turbulently descends a steep ravine in a southerly direction, and soon empties into what is known as North Pond. From here, the water runs eastward into a branch of the Contoocook River and eventually into the Merrimack. In the nine miles before joining the Contoocook, the water falls a total of 600 feet.⁶ The best place to harness the power created by this fall is where Goose Brook descends the steep ravine, and here it was that the mill village of Harrisville was built.

The remote and rugged nature of this highland region, together with the danger of Indian raids during the French and Indian War, served to delay permanent settlement of Dublin and Nelson until the 1760s.⁷ Even then, especially for Nelson, growth was slow until after the Revolution.⁸ For this early period, it is difficult to estimate the population of the area later to be the town of Harrisville. In the southeast part of Nelson, which was to make up more than a quarter of Harrisville, there were living in 1774 fourteen settlers, most of them with families.⁹ In the northern part of Dublin, which was later to form nearly two thirds of Harrisville, settlement was still more sparse. Perhaps not more than seven families were living in this area in 1774.¹⁰ Most of those who settled within the limits of Harrisville before the Revolution came from Massachusetts towns like Dunstable, Sherborn, and Sudbury. A few came from nearby towns in New Hampshire, such as Mason and Temple. Two came from England, and the names of the others—Adams, Bemis, Harris, Twitchell—suggest their English background.¹¹

The first settler on the site of the village of Harrisville came there at the very end of the colonial period, in 1774. He was Abel Twitchell, from Sherborn, Massachusetts.¹² His father, Joseph Twitchell, Esq., was the leading citizen of Sherborn. He was also agent for some of the proprietors or holders of land in Dublin and sold land to those who wished to settle there, a number that eventually included two of his daughters and five of his sons. The eldest of these, Samuel, claimed to be the third permanent settler in Dublin and owned a sawmill in the southern part of town. Another son, Eleazer, lived for a time in Nelson. There he owned a large tract of land which surrounded Brackshin Pond, as Harrisville Pond was then called. Abel himself had moved to Dublin, returned to Sherborn, and finally returned again to Dublin to settle on Goose Brook.¹³ The rough, rocky lot with its steep gorge and turbulent brook was not land to attract a farmer, but undoubtedly it was these features that attracted Twitchell. He soon had built a grist- and sawmill at the mouth of Brackshin Pond and also acquired his brother

6 Hamilton Child, *Gazetteer of Cheshire County, New Hampshire, 1763–1885. Part First*, p. 175.

7 Leonard, 1855, pp. 130–131.

8 Jeremy Belknap, MS Description of Packersfield, N.H. [ca. 1789].

9 *Masonian Papers*, VII, 36, in *N.H. State Papers*, XXVIII, 44.

10 Cf. Appendix 1.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Leonard, 1855, p. 273.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 402–405; Humphrey, *op. cit.*; Simon Goodell Griffin *et al.*, *Celebration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Town of Nelson, New Hampshire, 1767–1917*, p. 17.

Eleazer's land in Nelson, which gave him control of the entire waterpower of the pond and the stream below it.¹⁴

Abel Twitchell also built a square, two-and-half-story, frame house. It still stands, perched on the rocky slopes above the stream. Despite changing architectural style and the use of different materials, this first house seems to have been used as a model for those later built around it. (Plate II) After Abel Twitchell, the next person to settle here was Jason Harris, of Framingham, Massachusetts. "At an early date," perhaps in 1778, he built a blacksmith and trip-hammer shop a short distance downstream from Abel Twitchell, but he did not stay long.¹⁵ "Twitchell's Mills" was a logical name for this tiny settlement, and thus it was known for half a century.¹⁶ A residence or two and two small mills drawing a meager custom from a sparsely settled countryside, this must have been the extent of the settlement until the end of the eighteenth century. Until then, also, the history of Harrisville is very much the history of Dublin and Nelson.

The early political and economic life of these two towns was quite similar, and they can be studied to advantage side by side. Both were part of the Masonian Grants, that is, the New Hampshire lands purchased from the heir of the original claimant, Captain John Mason, by a group of proprietors who thereafter made grants for settlement. Dublin, then known as "Monadnock Number Three," was chartered in 1749, and Nelson, or "Monadnock Number Six," was chartered in 1752.¹⁷ The proprietors laid down very specific conditions in these original grants. Certain lots were reserved for the support of religion and education. Others were reserved for the proprietors. A meetinghouse was to be built within a specified time. The grants also contained detailed timetables for settlement: so many acres in each share¹⁸ to be cleared, fenced, and prepared for mowing or tillage within so many years, dwelling houses to be built and occupied by such a time, and so on.¹⁹ Considering the speculative nature of these grants and the difficulties of settling the region, many of these terms were probably impractical. At any rate, they were not fulfilled; when the time expired, the original grants were renewed for the current holders.²⁰

The grantees, or shareholders, of Dublin and Nelson were apt to be men of some wealth living in the central or eastern part of the state. They were not the sort likely to move to the raw frontier, and, so far as is known, none of them ever settled on the lands they owned there.²¹ Probably very few of them ever saw their lands. Instead, they sought to sell their shares, or lots,

14 Leonard, 1855, p. 273; Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

15 Leonard, 1855, pp. 144, 273. The shops of both men have long since disappeared.

16 Philip Carrigan, *Map of New Hampshire* (1816); Child *op. cit.*, pp. 175-176.

17 Nelson was incorporated in 1774 with the name of "Packersfield," and in 1814 received its present name. (Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 5, n. 1.) To avoid confusion, if not anachronisms, it will hereafter be called Nelson.

18 In Dublin a share was equal to three lots, and in Nelson equal to two lots.

19 *N.H. State Papers*, XXVII, 171-174, in Leonard, 1855, pp. 5-6, 124-129; *N.H. State Papers*, XXVIII, 4-6, in Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.

20 *Masonian Papers*, VII, 3, 38, in *N.H. State Papers*, XXVIII, 8, 47.

21 Leonard, 1855, pp. 5, 130. For names of Grantees of Dublin and Nelson see *N.H. State Papers*, XXVII, 175-176; XXVIII, 4, 7.

either to men who would settle there or to other speculators.

Leonard, in *The History of Dublin, New Hampshire*, writes that "After the close of the French War, there was a numerous emigration from Massachusetts into New Hampshire. The proprietors of the unsold lands in the southern townships offered strong inducements to young men to purchase farms, and remove thither."²²

It was this emigration that provided Dublin and Nelson with their first permanent inhabitants. The earliest settlers in Dublin were some Scotch-Irish who came from neighboring Peterborough during the French and Indian War. Perhaps the region was too rugged even for the Scotch-Irish. Whatever the reason, they all removed, leaving behind little but the name of the town to indicate their presence.²³ By 1762, English settlers were coming up from Sherborn, Massachusetts, to work on the roads, clear land, and build homes. Several of them became residents within the next two years, and thereafter the settlement proceeded steadily if slowly.²⁴ Nelson lagged behind by several years. Breed Batchelder, a man of exceptional ability from Brookfield, Massachusetts, was the town's first resident. He came to Nelson in 1766, and others came shortly afterward from Dunstable, Hubbardston, and Marblehead, Massachusetts.²⁵

Essential for orderly settlement was the early surveying and laying out of the new towns. Dublin was surveyed in 1750 by the proprietors' agent Joseph Blanchard.²⁶ The town was in the shape of a rectangle, or more exactly, a parallelogram, seven miles east to west and five miles north to south. This area was laid out in ten ranges running east and west, and numbered one to ten from south to north. Each range was divided into twenty-two lots, numbered from east to west, making in all two hundred and twenty lots of rather more than one hundred acres each.²⁷ Seven lots lying on Monadnock mountain were excluded, leaving 213, or 3 apiece for each of the 71 shares. The survey completed, the lots were distributed the same year by a sort of lottery. The grantees drew lots for their turn to draw the three numbers that should represent their respective holdings; then, in turn, they again drew to determine where their lands should be. This determined, the grantees could go or send to Dublin to find their lots and see whether they lay under water, were boulder-strewn hillsides, or whatever. Certainly not all were pleased with what they found. It is not known what John Usher thought of his Lot 13, Range 10, the site of the village of Harrisville, but he soon disposed of it to Matthew Thornton, Esq., a large landowner

22 Leonard, 1855, p. 133.

23 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

24 *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 132-134.

25 Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-9, 12.

26 *N.H. State Papers*, XXVII, 177.

27 *Ibid.*; Humphrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-4.

in Dublin. He in turn sold the lot to Abel Twitchell in 1778, several years after Twitchell first settled there.²⁸

Nelson, adjoining Dublin to the north, was a rectangle eight miles east to west and five miles north to south. Breed Batchelder, a trained surveyor, made the survey in 1768. The plan was more complicated than Dublin's, but this was due to a more piecemeal settlement and to plans drawn before the survey was made. In 1761, the grantees had divided the town into quarters by running intersecting center lines.²⁹ Batchelder laid out each quarter in gridiron fashion. He first divided a quarter into ranges running north and south, and numbered from west to east, and then divided these ranges into lots, numbered from south to north. Each lot was 160 by 104 rods, or 104 acres. This system resulted in equal shares, but there were strips of land left over in each quarter, and there was no coincidence of the lines in the different quarters.³⁰

The rectangular land survey of New England was undoubtedly a more orderly system than some others used in the colonies, but, as can be seen, it had its complications. Nonetheless, the system worked well enough in a pioneer settlement where uncleared land was at a discount and where the immediate tasks were not to define boundaries but to clear and plant and build. Probably more troublesome than boundaries was the matter of titles. Charles A. Bemis, a local historian and resident of a century later, wrote of Nelson that "there was much difficulty about titles in the early days, and several families came to settle but got discouraged and left. Some had to pay twice for their land or lose it. . . ."³¹ Incidents of this sort must have been unusual, but they suggest one more potential hazard for the early settler.

The prices paid by the settlers for their lands are mentioned only occasionally in the historical accounts. In 1763, Breed Batchelder purchased one third of the southwest quarter of Nelson, 2,135 acres, for £60 sterling.³² In 1770, the widow of Agent Joseph Blanchard sold one hundred acres of land in Nelson for £10 sterling.³³ C. A. Bemis, citing no evidence, writes that land was very cheap, sometimes as low as thirty cents an acre but rising to as high as four dollars an acre in war times.³⁴ Sometime before 1774, James Bancroft is reported to have bought 416 acres—four lots—in southeast Nelson and paid for them with one pair of steers.³⁵ And in 1778, Abel Twitchell, for the entire of Lot 13, Range 10, in Dublin, paid Matthew Thornton just £15 sterling.³⁶

Facing the new settlers were the arduous tasks of opening

28 Leonard, 1855, p. 6; Humphrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 3–4. Thornton was also a signer of the Declaration of Independence.

29 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 8. For Breed Batchelder's Plan of 1768, see *N.H. State Papers*, XXVIII, 8.

31 Bemis MSS, Box 6, XLVIII, 235.

32 *N.H. Records*, May 1765, in Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

33 *N.H. State Papers*, XXVIII, 9.

34 Bemis MSS, Box 6, XLVIII, 235.

35 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

36 Cheshire County Records, Book 23, pp. 123–125, in Humphrey, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

roads, clearing fields, and building homes. Sometimes they began this work on a "non-resident" basis, as did the early Dublin settlers who came up from Sherborn during the slack seasons,³⁷ or Breed Batchelder who boarded with a friend in Keene while building his house in Nelson.³⁸ Others simply plunged in, living in a rough camp during the good weather. However they went about the job of making new homes in the wilderness, it was an undertaking unlikely to end in success without stamina, intelligence, doggedness, and good fortune—all in ample proportions.

The land to which Batchelder and his neighbors came must have been all but covered with unbroken forest, a mixed growth of oak, sugar maple, ash, birch, walnut, pine, and hemlock.³⁹ Griffin writes that Aaron Beal, in the southeast quarter of Nelson, pastured his cows on the site of the later village of Chesham, perhaps two miles distant, "that being the nearest place where grass grew. . . ."⁴⁰ While the forest hindered travel and farming, it provided wood for housing, fuel, and household articles. It also provided a cash crop in the form of potash, or "salts," when the settler burning over his land took the trouble to gather the ashes and boil them.⁴¹ In short, the forest was a large part of the challenge facing the first settlers.

The early roads through the forest were as primitive as they were essential. There must have been a road running from Keene eastward through Dublin to Peterborough as early as 1759.⁴² In like manner, the first road into Nelson also climbed northeasterly from Keene, passed the house of Breed Batchelder, and continued to the center of town.⁴³ Perhaps as early as 1768, and certainly by 1773, Dublin and Nelson were connected by a road. At that time a road ran from Dublin center through the northwest part of town to Nelson center.⁴⁴ In 1774, when Abel Twitchell settled at the mouth of Brackshin Pond, the town of Nelson planned a road that would connect him with the village. The committee that laid it out described the last stretch of this road in the usual fashion:

Beginning at a Large hemlock at the Brook Running into the North-westerly side of Brackshin pond so called, and then runs Northerly to a spruce, then to a Large Black Birch, then to a small Beach . . . to a Large Red oak Tree southerly of James Bancroft's old Barn Near the Brook, it being the Last mentioned Bound of the Road Laid out from the Meeting House. . . .⁴⁵

One writer, whose grandfather helped to build the first roads in Dublin, described them as being "little more than openings cut

37 Leonard, 1855, p. 133.

38 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

39 Howarth, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Leonard, 1855, p. 119.

40 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

41 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

42 Leonard, 1855, pp. 8, 131.

43 Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 16–17.

44 Leonard, 1855, pp. 8–9; Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

45 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

through the dense, continuous woods, with some slight demonstration towards a partial removal of the rocks, logs and stumps, and leveling of the grosser inequalities of the surface."⁴⁶ Work on these roads was never really finished. It required the continual effort of those the roads served to keep them in passable condition. Mending the roads was also, in this land of little money, a common way of discharging one's highway taxes.⁴⁷

Ingenuity and hard work were required to keep the roads open during the deep snows of winter time. Leonard describes how it was done in Dublin. Beginning at Twitchell's Mills

The oxen and young cattle were turned unyoked into the road, and one person went before them to commence a track, and he was followed by the cattle. When the man on the lead became tired, another took his place. At each settlement, the fresh cattle were put forward; and, by being thus driven in Indian file, a good horse-path was made.⁴⁸

Winter and summer, for many years after Dublin and Nelson were first settled, most of the traveling was done on horseback or on foot.⁴⁹ Wheeled vehicles or sleighs were few. Heavy supplies were brought in on a horse-drawn rig similar to the *travois* used by the Indians.⁵⁰ Such roads meant hard traveling for a man on horseback, and even the experienced traveler was lucky not to lose his way. Probably it was a matter of mutual cause and effect that while the roads were so poor travel on them would be light, and so it seems to have been throughout the New England countryside.⁵¹

During those early years, especially through the long winters, the diet of the settlers was unappetizing and dull. Leonard cites one menu consisting of bean porridge for breakfast and supper, and a piece of pumpkin with a thin slice of pork baked upon it for dinner.⁵² Griffin writes of those in Nelson that "they often lived almost wholly upon boiled rye. . . ." Game was "tolerably plenty," but not so the supply of lead and powder with which to hunt. Other commodities mentioned are salt pork and rum. This last, together with a hearty appetite, must have helped considerably with such a diet.⁵³

The rudeness of the frontier homes is impressive. Leonard describes them in Dublin, citing as his source one who certainly saw this type of dwelling.

Neither bricks, nails, nor boards were accessible; and for dwelling places, the pioneers in the settlement built with logs what would now be called a pen, in dimensions about fifteen feet by twelve, having two doors, one on the south side and the other on the east. For a roof, they

46 Leonard, 1855, p. 8.

47 In 1772, the proprietors voted that the grantees, or those holding land under them, might work out their highway taxes. This was to be allowed at the rate of three shillings per day per man in summer and two shillings six pence in winter. Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

48 Leonard, 1855, p. 283.

49 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 17; Leonard, 1855, p. 283.

50 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

51 Charles Francis Adams, *History of Braintree, Massachusetts*, p. 84.

52 Leonard, 1855, p. 283.

53 Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 13, 18.

took spruce-bark, and tied it to poles by means of withes or twisted twigs. . . . For a chimney they laid stone up to the mantel-tree, and then split laths, built them up cob-house fashion, and plastered inside and outside with clay mortar.⁵⁴

During their first winter in town some families did not have even the dubious comfort of such a house but lived in rude shanties, or huts, without chimneys and providing little protection from the elements.⁵⁵ Such privation could hardly have lasted more than one season; without better shelter the family would have removed. More substantial housing had a high priority for the pioneer family. It is to be noted that even as early as 1774, of the settlers living in the southeast quarter of Nelson nearly as many had a "board house," as had a "pole house," or log house.⁵⁶ There is a substantial number of these improved dwellings still standing to testify eloquently of the skill of their builders.

The difficulties and hardships facing those who attempted to settle this highland region of southern New Hampshire seem to have been without number. Remoteness saved these towns from Indian attacks and enemy depredations during the Revolution⁵⁷ but had its own disadvantages. Also, various accounts mention the hazard of fire. Belknap, in 1789, wrote of Nelson that "several of the inhabitants have had their habitations burnt . . . a Disaster to which new Countries are peculiarly Subject."⁵⁸ A brief newspaper item of about the same time shows how this was likely to happen: "Last Friday night the house of Samuel Griffin Esq. of Packersfield was consumed by fire by reason of some hot ashes put in a tub near the side of the houses. . . ."⁵⁹ Abel Twitchell's mill also fell victim to fire, but was soon rebuilt.⁶⁰ The stories of early hardships tell of the alarms raised and the destruction done to livestock and crops by wild animals.⁶¹ Bears and wolves were troublesome in the region to the end of the century.⁶² However, it is probable that the long, severe winters and the meagerness of arable land discouraged more settlers than did anything else. All things considered, it is little wonder that towns like Dublin and Nelson grew slowly, remained sparsely populated, and were soon being forsaken by the young, the restless, the hopeful, and, sometimes, by the simply weary.⁶³

Under the proprietors, political organization had proceeded apace. After proper petition to the royal governor, Dublin was incorporated in 1771, and Nelson in 1774.⁶⁴ In both places during these years before the Revolution, the main items of business before the town meetings were to open roads, build a meeting-house, and settle a minister.⁶⁵ The meetinghouse and the minister's

54 Leonard, 1855, pp. 279–280; Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

55 Leonard, 1855, p. 281.

56 *Masonian Papers*, VII, 36, in *N.H. State Papers*, XXVIII, 44.

57 Leonard, 1855, p. 281.

58 Belknap, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

59 *New Hampshire Recorder*, Sept. 16, 1790, in Bemis MSS, Box 2, XLVII, h.

60 Leonard, 1855, p. 273.

61 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 13; Leonard, 1855, pp. 28–29, 280–281.

62 Leonard, 1855, p. 28.

63 At least one out of four of the eighteenth-century settlers within the area of Harrisville eventually removed. See Appendix 1.

64 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 12; Leonard, 1855, pp. 139–140.

65 Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–11; Leonard, 1855, p. 146.

salary were paid for by laying a tax on each share or lot, and the first minister also received his one share of land, as provided in the charters. Dublin had built its meetinghouse, rough-boarded and lacking pews, and hired its minister by 1772. Nelson lagged behind only slightly.⁶⁶ It may be remarked that neither town kept its first minister for long. In these years also, as evidenced by the regular appearance of the same names in the town records, the natural leaders in these settlements were emerging.⁶⁷ If their political and religious institutions were still inchoate, the progress made by the settlers of Dublin and Nelson in their first decade was nonetheless impressive.

The role these towns played in the Revolution was minor but creditable. They both had formed revolutionary committees before hostilities commenced.⁶⁸ Nelson received word of the clash at Lexington and Concord on the day after the battle, and at sunrise on the twenty-first a company of twenty-seven men left town for the scene of action.⁶⁹ When the "Association Test," the loyalty oath of the Revolution, was submitted to them, the residents of Dublin and Nelson signed it, with one conspicuous exception.⁷⁰ Breed Batchelder, Nelson's first resident, leading citizen, and principal landowner (and a Major in the Provincial Militia to boot), remained stubbornly loyal to the Crown. This was to cost him dearly. After being imprisoned, and hiding in a cave for three months, he fled the colony, served in the British army, and died in the exile of Nova Scotia. His lands, amounting to nearly one quarter of the entire town, were confiscated.⁷¹ In their loyalty to the American cause, Dublin and Nelson had a somewhat better record than various other towns in the same part of New Hampshire.⁷² In furnishing men and means for the Revolutionary cause, both did well for towns remote from the scene of any action. Leonard gives the names of twenty-six men who went to war from Dublin, and Griffin lists fifty-five men then living in Nelson who served enlistments.⁷³

The original settlement of Dublin and Nelson had come with the expansion of the colonies that followed the French and Indian War. Now, in the two or three decades after the Revolution, these towns were to experience a new and much larger growth. The census figures show a dramatic rise in population. At the time of the New Hampshire census in 1775, Dublin had a population of 305 and Nelson 186. By the time of the first federal census in 1790, Dublin had boomed to 905 and Nelson to 721.⁷⁴

Confronted with this new migration, Dublin took steps to avoid becoming freighted with paupers and to keep down the

66 Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 10–12, 16; Leonard, 1855, pp. 11, 30, 154ff.

67 Cf. Dublin Town Records, 1771–1806, *passim*; Town Records of Monadnock Number Six and Packersfield, 1751–1801, *passim*.

68 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 18; Leonard, 1855, pp. 18, 148.

69 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

70 *N.H. State Papers*, VIII, ix, 228, 263. In Dublin there were fifty-seven signers and no nonsigners; in Nelson thirty-eight signers and one nonsigner. These were all the males over twenty-one years of age in the two towns.

71 Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–25.

72 *Ibid.*, p. 21, note.

73 Leonard, 1855, pp. 20–23, 148–151; Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 31–161, *passim*.

74 Jeremy Belknap, *The History of New Hampshire*, III, 238–239.

taxes. Taking advantage of a law that enabled towns to remove their liability for the support of paupers by warning from town all persons moving in for a settlement, the town for some years issued warnings-out-of-town indiscriminately to all newcomers, regardless of wealth or station. There must have been some droll scenes when town officials served these warnings upon substantial newcomers. Other towns also followed this practice, but apparently Nelson did not. It is a matter of conjecture whether this was due to the town's greater solicitude for its poor, or the lesser likelihood of attracting such paupers.⁷⁵

Jeremy Belknap, the early great historian of New Hampshire, wrote in 1789 a description of Nelson that was apparently based on personal observation. It was succinct and of practical outlook. He described the location and terrain and remarked on the number of ponds there. He noted the "clear and healthy" air and appraised the possibilities for cultivation. He told of the town's rapid growth since 1780, and he pointed out that "the inhabitants have been somewhat remarkable for their care to provide Schooling for their children, which has been commonly by a Female or Woman's school in the summer, and a Master's school in the Winter."⁷⁶

Concerning this matter of education, Nelson also had incorporated in 1797 a social library,⁷⁷ which would seem to corroborate Belknap's statement that the town showed a concern for education. Dublin, beginning with a small appropriation for schooling in 1773, had provided for public education and, a few years before Nelson, also formed a social library.⁷⁸ These developments were consistent with the general state of education in New Hampshire. During most of the eighteenth century there was great apathy about education, and the laws were very imperfectly enforced, but interest increased and conditions improved in the last decade of the century.⁷⁹

From this evidence, the town records, the accounts like Belknap's, the homes that were built and the lands that were cleared, there emerges a picture of these hill towns as industrious, growing, and hopeful agricultural communities. Another generation would see the opening up of the West and, for towns such as Dublin and Nelson, the beginning of a decline that would bring great changes.

In that "second wave" of settlers that came at the close of the Revolution was one Erastus Harris, father of the Jason Harris who had come to Dublin in 1778. Supposedly Erastus was the descendant of the Thomas Harris who came to America from Kent County, England, in 1630, with Roger Williams. Thomas

75 Leonard, 1855, pp. 26, 144-146; Daniel B. Cutter, *History of Jaffrey, N.H., 1749-1880*, pp. 167-168.

76 Belknap, MS Description of Packersfield, N.H., pp. 1-4.

77 *Laws of New Hampshire, 1792-1801*, VI, 459-460.

78 Leonard, 1855, pp. 246-261.

79 George Garvey Bush, *History of Education in New Hampshire*, pp. 9ff.

had followed Williams to Rhode Island, but some of the family later returned to Massachusetts. Erastus was born in Wrentham in 1731.⁸⁰ Before he was twenty-four, he had married and moved to nearby Medway. Here he worked as a carpenter with occasional flings at soldiering. He marched with several expeditions in the French and Indian War, including the one to Crown Point. No longer a young man when the Revolution began, he nonetheless answered the Lexington alarm and served eleven days as a sergeant in the militia. It is probable but not certain that he also served other enlistments during the War.⁸¹ Then, "about the time of the close of the Revolution," he moved once more, following his son Jason, to settle on a farm in the southeast quarter of Nelson. His home was a short distance away from Twitchell's Mill. Here in Nelson, working at farming and carpentering, Erastus Harris spent the last twenty-five years of his life.⁸² Little else is known about this progenitor of the Harris family that was to raise a new town.

Bethuel, his son and Jason's brother, was born in Medway in 1769 and followed his father to Nelson in 1786.⁸³ Why, as a boy of twelve, he had not come with his father is not clear. Perhaps Erastus came alone and the rest of the family later. Whatever the explanation, 1786 was a year of economic distress and social disorder in Massachusetts that provided good reasons for leaving then. Bethuel worked at carpentering with his father for several years before beginning on his own.⁸⁴

For one who, as his son later put it, came to Nelson "destitute of pecuniary ability," Bethuel did well for himself. Early in the 1790s, he bought a 280-acre farm that lay athwart the Nelson-Dublin town line.⁸⁵ In 1794, he married a daughter of neighbor Twitchell. (Plates III, IV) Deborah was then not eighteen years old but was certainly of hardy stock. (She bore her husband ten children, survived him by several years, and died at the age of seventy-nine.)⁸⁶ They lived on his farm at Nelson, while Bethuel combined farming and carpentering with an increasing role in town affairs. In 1800, he attempted to sell his farm, of which the advertisement in the *New Hampshire Sentinel* gives a description:

A farm in the southeasterly part of PACKERSFIELD containing about 160 acres of Land, with two small houses, a Barn, and other out houses, in good repair. Said Farm is well situated for carrying it on to advantage. There is a corn mill within 60 rods of the boundaries, and a blacksmith and clothier within a very short distance. A handsome credit, with good security, will be given for a large part of it. For further particulars enquire of the subscriber living on the premises
Packersfield, Nov. 8, 1800

Bethuel Harris⁸⁷

80 Albert Hutchinson, *A Genealogy and Ancestral Line of Bethuel Harris of Harrisville, New Hampshire, and His Descendants*, p. 10.

81 Griffin, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

82 Child, *op. cit.*, p. 178; Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-15.

83 D. Hamilton Hurd (ed.), *History of Cheshire and Sullivan Counties, New Hampshire*, p. 213; Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

84 Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 213; Hutchinson, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

85 Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

86 Leonard, 1855, p. 405; Leonard, 1920, p. 787.

87 NHS, Nov. 29, 1800.

There are several possible explanations for this advertisement. Bethuel may have wanted to move to his father's farm. His health may have prompted this move, for he was troubled with sciatica.⁸⁸ Or he may already have had his eye on other enterprises.

88 Hurd, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

At the end of the eighteenth century, then, the essentials were present for a new and different village in this highland region. Abel Twitchell's mill stood at the head of a roaring stream. To the north and south lay two agricultural towns that by great effort were still growing. And near the stream lived a man and his family with the ambition and the intelligence to build an industry on this waterpower.