

# **A Short History of Newton, Massachusetts, as it pertains to the date 1630**

**Historic Newton** / Clara Silverstein, August 2023; Lisa Dady, May 2024

What is now Newton sits on land of Native people who have lived in this region for more than 12,000 years. European settlers / colonizers moved to the area in the 1600s. As histories were being written about what is now known as Newton, researchers mention 1630 because that is when Boston was being settled, and westward expeditions followed. For example, Cambridge and Watertown, portions of which eventually evolved into Newton, were becoming established in the 1630s.

English settlement in this area goes back to the 1630s. Up until 1688, this area was considered part of Cambridge, not Newton as it is known today. Because Cambridge Common was a long way to travel for town meetings and religious services, several families in today's Newton began to separate from Cambridge. In 1670 they built a meeting house and established a burying ground at the corner of Centre and Cotton Streets. In 1688, an independent township was established here and it was known as Cambridge Village, New Cambridge, Newtown, or New Town. On December 15, 1691, Newton became the official name of the town.

Also in 1630, a party of English led by Roger Clap rowed up the Charles River to a point near the present site of Perkins School for the Blind. The springs there were attractive for settlement. Later that year, Sir Richard Saltonstall, Reverend George Phillips, and others moved from Salem and Charlestown up river to gain more land. They named their new settlement Watertown. It was a large territory and included an area south of the Charles River that is now part of Newton.

Finally, white settlers were not living here in 1630 to “found” the town. As one historian tells it: “the First settlers to Cambridge Village [Newton] did not come in a body...from the first permanent settler, in 1639, to its separation from Cambridge,... only forty-two freemen came into the village as permanent settlers.” [*History of the Early Settlement of Newton, Francis Jackson, 1854.*] Setting aside the problematic notion of “founding” a place that was already found and lived in (by the Massachusett / Massachuseuk and others), the outlines of what we think of as Newton today were not established as early as 1630.

## **SOURCES**

### **History of the Founding of Newton, Thelma Fleishman, p. 7**

*Settlement of Newton began near the Brighton line in the 1630s, when this area south of the Charles River was still part of Cambridge. A generation later, because of the distances they had to travel to the meetinghouse near the Cambridge Common for town meetings and religious services, several families sought permission to conduct the latter separately. Eventually permission was granted and in 1770 they built a meetinghouse and established a burying place at the corner of Centre and Cotton Streets. In 1688, what had been known as Cambridge Village was incorporated as the Town of Newton.*

### **Tercentenary History of Newton, Henry K. Rowe, p. 2-3**

*With the first shiploads in 1630 sailed John Winthrop, who had been chosen by the Company as governor of the new colony, Thomas Dudley, the deputy governor, and Reverend George Phillips, an ordained minister. They landed first at Salem but finding that settlement overpopulated they made their way to Charlestown. Presently Boston, Dorchester, Roxbury, and other settlements were being made, and new arrivals were coming until the number swelled to more than 20,000 before the decade was over and Civil War in England checked emigration.*

*The new settlements were restricted in area, and exploring parties soon scouted farther afield. A party of 10 men rowed up the Charles River on the 20th of May [1630] as far as the site of the Watertown arsenal, where they landed and had friendly conference with the Indians. The springs at the bend of the river were attractive for settlement. In July Sir Richard Saltonstall, with his minister, Reverend George Phillips, and several others who had camped at Salem and Charlestown, moved up river to get unrestricted pasturage and more farming land. Their new settlement was named Watertown. It was the first experiment so far inland and the first frontier town towards the west. Like pioneer frontier settlements out on the prairies, it was unlimited in territory for a time. It included the south side of the Charles River, which is now Newton, and extended northward to Charlestown. Soon it was limited southward by the creation of Dedham and to the northwest by the setting off of Concord and Sudbury.*

**Town of Watertown official website, <https://www.watertown-ma.gov/407/History-Tourism>**

#### *Roger Clap & the Dorchester Men*

*In May 1630, a party led by Roger Clap, landed on the steep banks of Charles River at a point near the present site of Perkins School for the Blind. He tells of the first encounter with the Pequossette. . . . Soon after Clap's group left, at Governor Winthrop's order, to settle in Dorchester where it was thought the land was better for cattle.*

#### *Watertown Became an Official Settlement*

*In July of that same year (1630), a small company of Englishmen and those who had arrived from England on the Arbella, made their way up the Charles and landed at a point near the present location of Mt. Auburn Hospital in Cambridge. These Englishmen were led by Sir Richard Saltonstall and his Minister George Phillips. At first called Saltonstall Plantation, their settlement officially became Watertown in September 1630.*

#### **BRIEF HISTORY OF CAMBRIDGE, MASS.,**

**<HTTPS://WWW.CAMBRIDGEMA.GOV/HISTORIC/CAMBRIDGEHISTORY>**

*In 1630, a fleet of 11 ships carrying 700 passengers, set sail from England, bound for the Massachusetts Bay Colony. This dedicated band of Puritans hoped to build their community around a purer, more Biblical church. . . . Seeking a protected site, John Winthrop and his assistants chose a small hill on the north bank of the Charles River, at the entrance to a small creek, 5 miles upstream from Boston. . . . European-introduced diseases and tribal wars had severely impacted and reduced the size of native population prior to 1630. The English colonists secured a deed from the female chief of the Massachusett tribe, who was living near the confluence of Alewife Brook and the Mystic River. In 1640 the General Court ordered that she be paid about £23 for the land occupied by Cambridge and Watertown and given a coat every winter during her lifetime. Newtowne, as Cambridge was called by the colonists until 1638, was laid out in an orderly grid of streets, bounded today by Eliot Square and Linden Street, Massachusetts Avenue and the River.*

#### **History of Newton by Francis Jackson (published 1854)**

**<https://archive.org/details/historyofearlyse00jack/page/n11/mode/2up?view=theater>**