

## Beverly History from Settlement to 1800

### Settlement

Native Americans settled in what is now Beverly thousands of years ago. The area was called *Naumkeag* – meaning fishing place – and included Salem, Beverly, Marblehead, Manchester, Wenham, Danvers, parts of Topsfield and Middleton. Just a few years before the English colonization in the 1620s, the Agawam, along with all the eastern tribes, had been decimated by a plague, probably transmitted by European fisherman. In 1700 the natives were paid a little over £6 to secure English rights to the territory.

Beverly, known either as Bass River Side or Cape Ann Side by the English, was settled by Roger Conant and his followers. For nearly 40 years this area was a part of Salem. In 1635 a grant of 1000 acres was made to the 5 men who became known as the Old Planters. Along with their wives and children this little group of about 30 people settled on farms of 200 acres each. One of the first houses was built on Woodberry Point by John Woodberry. Today the site of this house is part of Lynch Park. The Balch House, owned by the Beverly Historical Society, was built on one of these original “plantations.” Farming remained an important economic activity into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Beverly citizens soon began to chafe against being part of Salem. Some of the difficult requirements included the long trip to mandatory church services each Sunday, Beverly men having to serve as fire watch and guard against Indian attacks far from their own homes. After a number of petitions the community was allowed to hire John Hale – first as teacher and then minister when the First Parish Church was established in 1667. This was also a first step toward political independence. Salem agreed to allow Beverly to formally become a town in 1668.

Like many communities Beverly became embroiled in the 1692 witchcraft crises. Reverend Hale testified against two of Beverly’s accused witches, Sarah Bishop (sometimes confused with Bridget Bishop, who was hanged) and Dorcas Hoar. Both Sarah and Dorcas survived the hysteria. Reverend Hale later wrote a book, *A Modest Inquiry into the Nature of Witchcraft*, an important contemporary account of the events.

Tradition has it that the town of Beverly was named after the town of Beverley in East Riding, Yorkshire, England, and was suggested by Major General Robert Sedgwick who fought in the expedition against Canada in 1654. The name was accepted, despite the fact that few settlers came from Yorkshire. However, in 1671, Roger Conant and over thirty townsfolk petitioned the General Court to change the name from Beverly to Budleigh. One reason stated was that the small town was given the nickname of “Beggarly” and another was that Budleigh, England, Conant’s hometown, was a coastal town like Beverly. The court rejected the petition, and the name Beverly was retained.

### **Maritime Commerce**

Very early in Beverly’s history fishing became an important economic enterprise. For generations Beverly fishermen headed to rich fishing banks where the catch was salted and later dried on fish ‘flakes’ – racks, that lined the beaches. In addition to fish, farm products and timber became important commodities in helping to establish maritime trade. These materials were sold in Europe, the southern colonies, the West Indies and eventually, Asia. Supporting the sea trade were such local businesses as shipbuilding, rope-making, and sail-making.

### **Revolutionary War**

As early 1765 Beverly citizens were active in fighting the British policies that they saw as threatening their traditional rights. Although they did not support violent acts like the Boston Tea Party, they cheered the repeal of the Stamp Act and local merchants organized a boycott of taxed British goods. A committee was formed to correspond with other American leaders about ways to respond to the increasingly hard treatment by the rulers in London. Representative, Henry Herrick was ordered by the Selectman to do all he could to preserve “our Rights, Liberties, and Privileges [sic].”

By 1775 Beverly men had formed three companies of militia numbering 271 men, each armed with musket, bayonet or sword, 1 pound of powder and 30 balls. They drilled and marched, readying themselves for war. Responding to the call on April 19, 1775, some Beverly men joined with a Danvers unit and hurried to Lexington and Concord. Other militia formed on the common and marched toward Cambridge, hoping to cut off the British as they retreated to Boston. They managed to make the 20 miles to Arlington, then called Menotomy, in just four hours, where some of the bloodiest fighting of the day took place. Several Beverly men were wounded and one, Reuben Kennison, was killed.

## **Washington's Naval Base and Privateers**

General George Washington named Beverly his naval base with the goal of developing a fleet that could interfere with the British vessels that were supplying the occupying army at Boston. In addition, the American forces were in desperate need of nearly everything necessary to conduct the war. Supply ships and troop transports were the prime objectives, since their goods were needed by Washington's army. Any non-military cargo was to be sold and the proceeds divided between the owners and crew, adding incentive for the crew. Between sixty and seventy vessels sailed out of Beverly Harbor, armed as privateers with the charge to capture and harass the vessels of the British commercial fleet. It was an expensive enterprise for the owners to arm and outfit these ships and it was dangerous for the crews to sail in them. Nevertheless, there were many who rose to the challenge, for there were great profits to be made while helping the cause of liberty. Privateering was so successful that the dockage in Beverly Harbor had to be expanded. The value of the prizes, which included vessels and cargo, brought an estimated five million pounds. In addition to helping the war effort, the captured goods gave a boost to the local economy.

Following the events of April of 1775 there was great concern for the defense of all the coastal towns. Beverly selectman divided the town into four sections and built watch towers, which were manned night and day. There was talk of mounting cannon at Woodberry's Point (Lynch Park) to guard the harbor, but nothing happened until a frightening attack came in October 1775.

## **The *Hannah* and the *Nautilus***

Commissioned by General Washington, the *Hannah*, an armed schooner built in Marblehead, was fitted out and sailed from John Glover's Wharf in Beverly under Captain Nicholas Broughton. After a month of harassing British vessels the *Hannah* set out on a new cruise and soon attracted the attention of the *Nautilus*, commanded by John Collins. Captain Collins had the American vessel outgunned and Broughton headed for the safety of Beverly Harbor, near present day Washington Street. The crew of the *Hannah* had scrambled to safety, and the British captain attempted to set fire to her as well as shooting at the town. On shore, Beverly men fired at the *Nautilus* and managed to move a cannon into place. Salem citizens rushed to assist their neighbors and the situation for the English looked dire. The only recourse was for the crew to stay below decks to escape the cross-fire. Finally the tide turned and the *Nautilus* floated free in the early

evening. This early naval battle ended in a stalemate, with one British sailor dead and several injuries to the local citizens.

Colonel John Glover and his regiment set up camp in what is now Independence Park in January 1776. In July, Colonel Glover received a copy of the newly issued Declaration of Independence. On July 17, he summoned his men and the local citizens to hear the Declaration read. Afterwards the church bells rang and cannon were fired. Troops remained there until they were called on to join the main army in New York later that month.

The paper currency offered by the new American government lost more and more value as the war dragged on. Local merchants refused to sell the commodities at the advertised price, for the low-value bills. This treatment caused some sixty women to protest such injustice. On a November morning they marched "in good order" down Main (now Cabot) Street to Bartlett Street to the wharves with two ox-carts and one musket, determined to seize the sugar stored at the distillery there. The foreman took exception to this, and locked the gates against them. Not deterred, they engaged several men with axes to break into the building, where they removed two hogsheads (large barrels) of sugar. Other merchants in the town who also had stores of this treasured substance saw the wisdom of selling at the agreed price