

A Brief History of the Founding of the Town of Tewksbury

By Nancy Reed, Tewksbury Town Historian 2024

The Town of Tewksbury was Incorporated on December 23, 1734.

The history of how Tewksbury came to be separated from Billerica, in 1734, centers on Samuel Hunt II, who is considered the 'Father of Tewksbury,' and Wamesit Village.

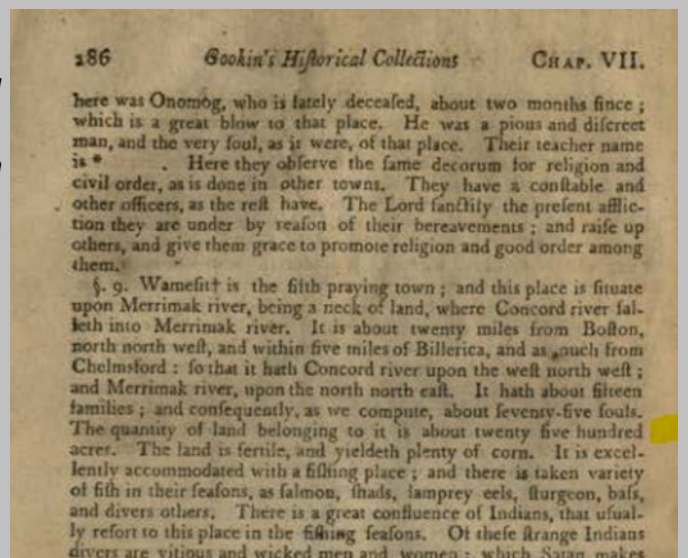
Samuel Hunt II was born in Ipswich, Massachusetts, in 1657 and he passed away in Tewksbury in 1742. Samuel's grandfather, William Hunt, had come to Massachusetts with Rev. Peter Bulkeley in 1635. Bulkeley is the Father of Concord, Massachusetts. They had set sail from Odell, England, after Rev. Bulkeley would not read the 'Book of Sports,' which prescribed what was allowed and prohibited as sporting activities on Sundays by King Charles in 1633. Bulkeley was ousted from his pulpit and the men decided to seek freedom of worship in New England.

William Hunt's grandson, Samuel II, would later be given the duty of guarding the Wamesit area, of what was Billerica, by the Merrimack River. This was how Samuel came to be settled in Wamesit and lead the founding of Tewksbury.

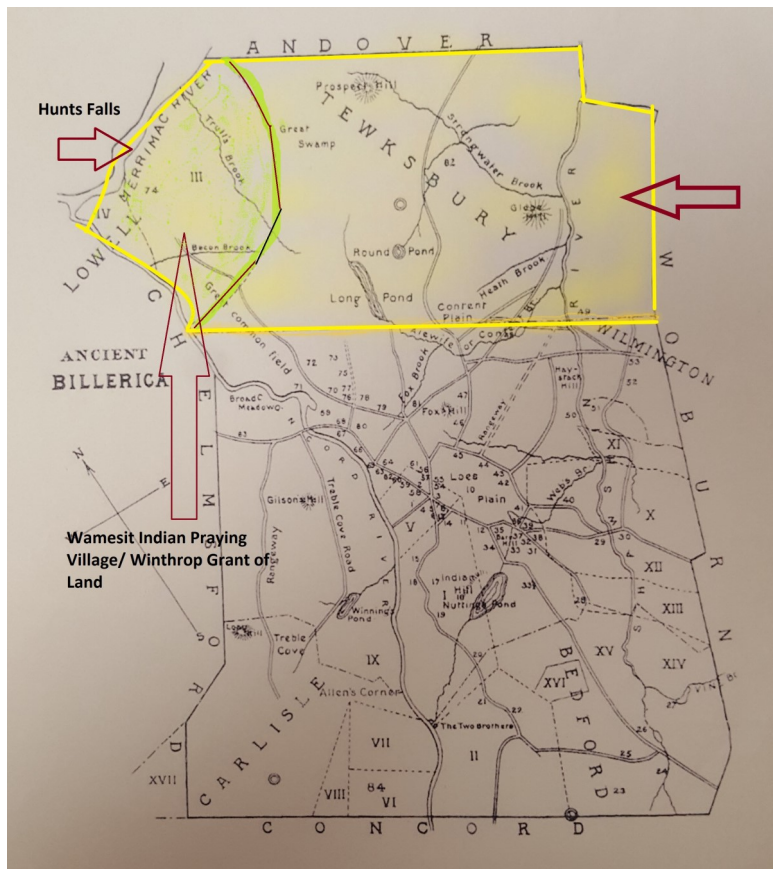
Back in 1640, the area of the Wamesit Village was made up of 3000 acres of land on either side of the Merrimack River, and had been granted to Margaret Winthrop, wife of the first Governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop. Known as the 'Winthrop Grant,' this was awarded by the General Court to thank them for their service. The provision was that no Anglo settlers could live there and as a result, the Wamesit Indians could remain settled in the area as they had done for 100s of years.

Wamesit Village, Tewksbury: According to Daniel Gookin's, 1792,
Historical Collection of Indians in New England:

'Wamesit is the fifth praying town; and this place is situated upon Merrimac River, being a neck of land, where Concord River falls into Merrimac River. It is about twenty miles from Boston, north north west, and within five miles of Billerica, and as much from Chelmsford: so that it hath Concord River upon the west north west; and Merrimac River, upon the north north east. It hath about fifteen families; and consequently, as we compute, about seventy-five souls. The quantity of land belonging to it is about twenty-five hundred acres. The land is fertile, and yields plenty of corn. It is excellently accommodated with a fishing place; and there is taken variety of fish in their seasons, as salmon, shads, lamprey eels, sturgeon, bass, and diverse others.'



Rev. John Eliot from Roxbury had been establishing Praying Villages for Indians in the Massachusetts area during the 1650s. He had established 15 villages and Wamesit was the 5th. The Wamesit Indians and the colonial settlers were generally friendly towards each other during these years.



In 1655, the Town of Billerica was established. In 1734, the northern section would be broken off as a separate Town and it included what is now Tewksbury and Tewksbury's part of the area of Wamesit Village, (which also extended into Chelmsford and Dracut.)

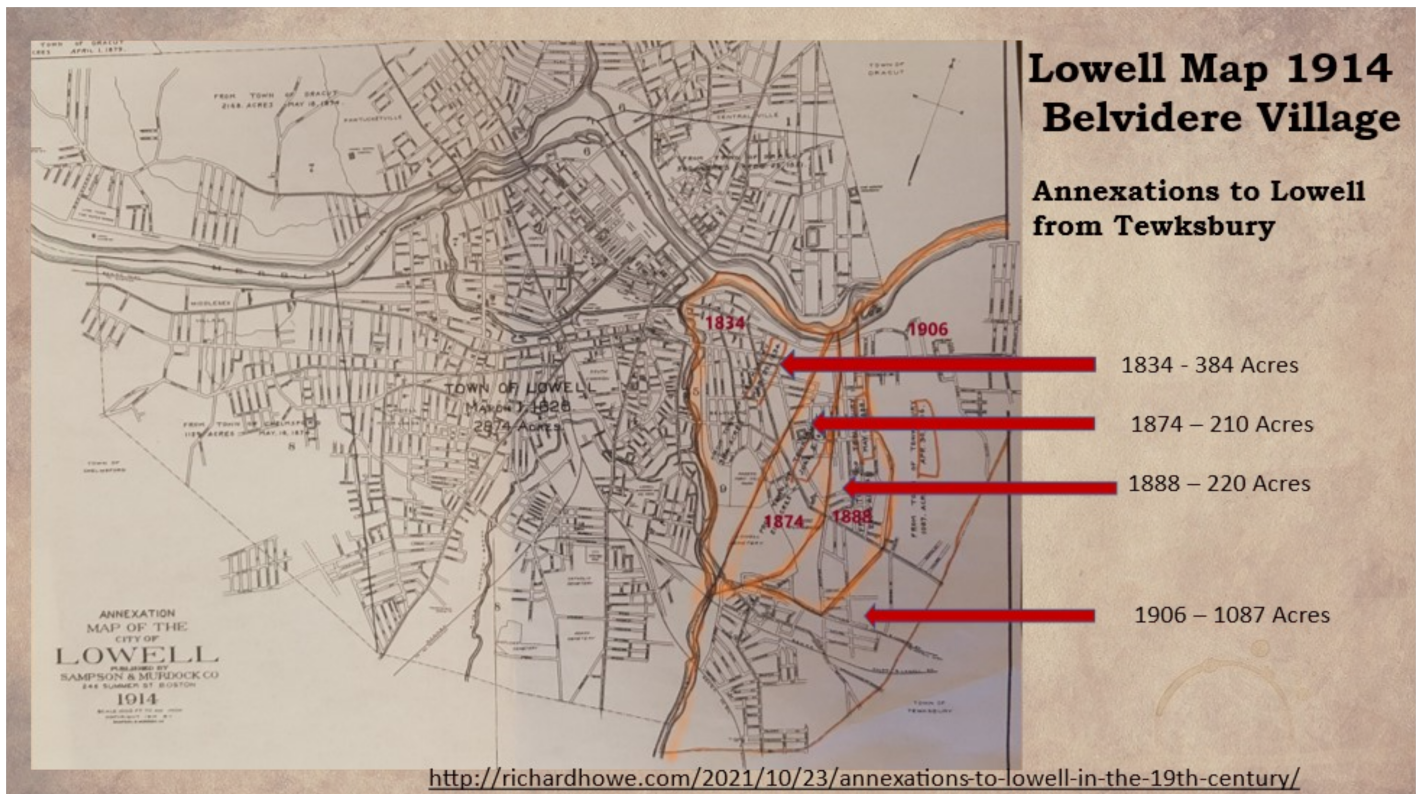
During the King Philip's War, 1675-1676, there was concern that unfriendly Indians would come from the north and cross the Merrimack River into the Wamesit Village area and further south into what was Billerica.

The grandson of Governor Winthrop, Waitstill Winthrop had inherited 1000 acres of his grandmother's 3000 acre land grant in Wamesit, which included the area where there was concern about Indians crossing the river from the north. Waitstill was serving as the Chief Judge of the Massachusetts Superior Court, he had heard of Samuel Hunt II's service

in previous wars and assigned him with the duty of taking up guard and garrison settlement on the River at that crossing spot for Indians during King Philips War. Samuel II would be the only Anglo allowed to settle in the area.

This crossing point on the Merrimack River would later be known as Hunt's Falls, Lowell, as noted in the encircled area on the 1831 map of Tewksbury, below.





The section of Wamesit that was next to the Merrimack River, at Hunt's Falls was part of Tewksbury until 1834, when sections were voted to be turned over to Lowell, due their industrial expansion and population.

See the map above for areas and years of separation to Lowell.

- ◆ In 1725, because the trip to Billerica center to get to church was so long, too cold in the winter and too warm in the summer, Samuel Hunt II and others petitioned the General Court to form a separate town, but no action was taken.
- ◆ In 1729, they submitted a bill to establish the Wamesit Parish, named after the Wamesit Indians, which effort failed when the proponents neither built a meetinghouse nor called a Minister in the prescribed time of 3 years.
- ◆ In 1733, another petition was set forth by Hunt and others to set aside a separate town from Billerica, and their wish was granted by the Legislature.

Massachusetts Governor Jonathan Belcher signed the bill which stated that the name of the town would be 'Tewksbury', on December 23, 1734. (A copy of the original bill and a transcript is on the next page.)

There is no record of the reason for the name of Tewksbury being chosen for the town. In addition, no relationship to Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire, England has ever been found.

A meetinghouse and church were established as prescribed, within 2 years of the Act. These would be a town meetinghouse and the Tewksbury Congregational Church in Town Center. These actions solidified the Incorporation of the Town of Tewksbury.

Anno
 7th Jacobi
 In Act
 For Dividing the Town
 of Billerica & erecting the Northerly and Northeast-
 erly part of said Town into a distinct Township
 by the Name of Tewksbury

WHEREAS the Inhabitants of the Northerly &
 Northeastly part of the Town of Billerica in the
 County of Middlesex are so situated in their habi-
 tations as to live remote from the Place of Pub-
 lick Worship & on that account as well as Divers
 others have laboured under great difficulties and
 hardships & for Relief therein have petitioned
 this Court the said Lands being already
 settled with a competent Number of Inhabitants
 to form a Township.

BE IT ENACTED by His Excellency the Go-
 vernor Council & Representatives in General Court
 assembled & by the Authority of the same That the
 Northerly & Northeastly part of the Town of
 Billerica with the Inhabitants thereon be & here-
 by are set off from the said Town of Billerica
 & erected into a separate & distinct Township by
 the Name of Tewksbury the Line or Boundary
 of said Town to take in two thirds of the Land
 from Andover Line to Billerica Meeting house by
 a Parallel Line with Andover Line extending
 from Concord River to Wilmington Line; And
 that the Inhabitants of the said Lands be & here-
 by are accordingly vested & endowed with all
 Powers Privileges Immunities & Advantages of any
 other Town in this Province do or by Law ought
 to have, hold or Enjoy; & the Inhabitants of the said
 Town of Tewksbury are hereby enjoined & Requir-
 ed within the space of Two Years from the Pub-
 lication of this Act to build & finish a suitable
 Meeting House for the Publick Worship of God
 & that they procure & settle a learned orthodox Mi-
 nister of good Conversation & make provision for
 his comfortable & honourable support provided never-
 theless that the Inhabitants of the said Town of
 Tewksbury be & hereby are Obligated to pay their
 Respective Proportions of all Province Taxes that
 are already assessed upon the Inhabi-
 tants of the aforesaid Town of Billerica hitherto
 arisen within the same.

ANNO Regni Regis GEORGII Secundi Octavo

AN ACT dividing the Town of Billerica & erecting the
 Northerly and Northeastly part of said town into a
 distinct Township by the Name of TEWKSBURY.

WHEREAS the Inhabitants of the Northerly &
 Northeastly part of the Town of Billerica in the
 County of Middlesex are so situated in their habita-
 tions as to live very remote from the Place of Publick Worship & on that
 account as well as divers others have laboured under great difficulties and
 hardships & for relief therein have petitioned this Court the said Lands being
 already settled with a competent number of inhabitants to form a township.

BE IT ENACTED by His Excellency the Governor, Council & Repre-
 sentatives in General Court assembled & by authority of the same that the
 Northearly & Northeastly part of the Town of Billerica with the inhab-
 itants thereon be & hereby are set off from the said Town of Billerica & erected
 into a separate & distinct Township by the name of Tewksbury, the line or
 boundary of said Town to take in two thirds of the land from Andover line
 to Billerica Meeting House by a parallel line with Andover line extending
 from Concord River to Wilmington line; and that the inhabitants of the said
 Lands, be & hereby are accordingly vested & endowed with all powers,
 privileges, immunities & advantages which the inhabitants of any other Town
 in this Province do or by Law ought to have, hold or enjoy; & the inhabitants
 of the said Town of Tewksbury are hereby enjoyed & required within the
 space of Two Years from the Publication of this Act to build & finish a suit-
 able Meeting House for the Publick Worship of God, & that they procure &
 settle a learned orthodox Minister of good conversation & make provision for
 his comfortable & honorable support provided nevertheless that the inhab-
 itants of the said Town of Tewksbury be & hereby are obliged to pay their
 respective proportion of all Province Taxes that are already assessed upon
 the Inhabitants of the aforesaid Town of Billerica hitherto arisen within the
 same.

December 17, 1734. This Bill having been read throo several times, in
 the House Representatives passed to be enacted.

J. QUINCY, Sp'kr.

December, 1734. This Bill having been read throo several times in
 Council passed to be enacted.

THADDEUS MASON, Dep. Sec'y.

December 23, 1734. By his Excellency, the Govnor I consent to the
 enacting of this bill.

Jn. BELCHER.

December 17, 1734. This Bill having been read throo several times in
 the House of Representatives passed to be enacted.
 J. QUINCY, Sp'kr.

December 23, 1734. This Bill having been read throo several times
 in Council passed to be enacted.
 THADDEUS MASON, Dep. Sec'y.

December 23, 1734. By His Excellency the Governor
 I consent to the enacting of this bill.
 Jn. BELCHER.

Published by J. Belcher, 1734.
 Tewksbury
 Dec: 23. 1734
 1734/35
 Chap. 17