

Lesson Plan

The New Hampshire – Massachusetts Border Dispute

This is an adaptation of a lesson plan prepared by Daniel Clary while participating in the New Hampshire Historical Society's New Hampshire History Summer Institute.

What Students Learn

In cooperative groups, students will use primary and secondary source material to trace the development of the separation of New Hampshire from the overwhelming influence of the larger colony of Massachusetts.

Procedures

Complete the six tasks listed on separate pages.

Lesson Materials

Excerpts from Historical New Hampshire; excerpts from Van Deventer's Provincial New Hampshire, 1623-1741, including a map (and an adaptation of the map) from 1741 to be associated with specific tasks (see procedures).

Bibliography

Most entries, as well as other teacher resources, are available through the New Hampshire Historical Society's Tuck Library and its Museum Store.

Van Deventer, David E. *The Emergence of Provincial New Hampshire, 1623-1741*.

Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.

Wallace, R. Stuart. "The 'Irish Party' and the New Hampshire/Massachusetts Boundary Controversy, 1719-1741," *Historical New Hampshire*, 49 (Summer 1994): 97-119.

Assessment Tools and Techniques

1. Each group must be prepared to present any or all of the tasks to the class without knowing in advance which task it will be called upon to explain.
2. Members within a group will be called randomly to report for the group.
3. Groups will modify their written responses to incorporate any additional information supplied by the reporting group.
4. Each group will make and display a transparency of its map for class inspection.

Task One: The NH–MA Boundary Dispute

Read the passages below and describe in your own words what led to the boundary dispute between the two colonies, and what specifically was at stake for New Hampshire?

The origins of the boundary controversy lay in the jurisdictional separation of Massachusetts and New Hampshire in 1679, which placed the two colonies competition with each other.

The northern boundary of Massachusetts had been established in its original charter and was restated by English judges in 1677 as “all those lands . . . which lie and be within the space of three English miles to the northward of the . . . Merrimack River, or to the northward of any and every part thereof.” But when Massachusetts received its new charter in 1691, the phrase “of any and every part thereof” was omitted from the boundary description, although the commissions of the various New Hampshire governors from Allen in 1692 through Burnett in 1728 continued the former phrasing when describing the borders of New Hampshire.

Van Deventer, 72-73.

The stakes for New Hampshire were particularly high. Failure to obtain at least the upper Merrimack Valley, if not lands to the west of the Merrimack, would make New Hampshire a province of insignificant size surrounded by a much larger neighbor. Its very existence would be questioned, and Massachusetts authorities would almost certainly follow up a victory on the boundary question — with a petition to re-annex the stranger within its midst.

Wallace, 110-111.

Task Two: The NH–MA Boundary Dispute

Read the passage below and describe the “turning point,” beginning in 1718, that caused the two colonies to go their separate ways, and explain the actions taken by each at this time.

...a turning point [in the boundary dispute] was at hand. In 1718, some 500 Scotch-Irish immigrants arrived in Boston and sought a township grant, but the Massachusetts government could not satisfy their needs. In April 1719, a number of them (without legal authority from any source) established a settlement at Nutfield, partially within the area contested by Massachusetts and New Hampshire, north of the Merrimack River. ... The Massachusetts government refused ...[to grant them either legal recognition or a township grant] on the grounds that their town was out of its jurisdiction.

This refusal indicated that the Massachusetts government was not aggressively pushing its boundary claims against its smaller neighbor, ...[New Hampshire].

* * * *

The Nutfield petition [for a township grant] was presented to the New Hampshire government in September; in December, the New Hampshire General Assembly instructed its commissioners to run the line westward from the coast “till you meet the great river which runs out of Winnepesaukee Pond,” discriminating for the first time between the Merrimack River in its east-west course and in its north-south course and contesting the traditional view that the Merrimack River represented the western boundary of the colony as well as the southern boundary.

Van Deventer, 75-76

Task Three: The NH–MA Boundary Dispute

Read the passage below and explain how New Hampshire’s General Assembly, in 1720, conceived of land “west of the Merrimack River.” What do you think was the effect of the General Assembly’s perception on relations between the colonies?

When in 1720, the General Assembly chose a new agent for New Hampshire, it pointedly explained to him the conflict of interest between the two colonies and instructed him to place the dispute before the Board of Trade along with the proper maps. He was instructed that “the extent of this province is all the lands between Massachusetts and Province of Maine, our south bounds is [sic] three miles north of the Merrimack River at the Atlantic Ocean . . . and from thence a west line into the main land so far as the Massachusetts [land] extends” — a direct challenge to Massachusetts’ claims west of the Merrimack. Moreover, for the first time the northern boundary of New Hampshire was challenged.

Van Deventer, 76.

Task Four: The NH–MA Boundary Dispute

Read the passage below and describe how the colonies' conflict was reflected in the personal conflict between New Hampshire's lieutenant governor, John Wentworth, and Jonathan Belcher, appointed governor of Massachusetts in 1730. Include a discussion of the techniques each man used to extend his power.

John Wentworth, who was not only the lieutenant governor in 1726 in New Hampshire, but was also a prominent local sea captain, a mast trader, and a merchant, led an all out assault against the Massachusetts practice of assigning land grants in the disputed territories.

In 1726 the Massachusetts government granted the township of Penacook to some settlers. This grant was located just west of the Merrimack River near present-day Concord, New Hampshire. The New Hampshire government responded by granting the township of Bow in the same area.... Until 1730, the Wentworth faction (some lumberers, merchants, and local royal officials) had its way in New Hampshire politics, but the appointment of Jonathan Belcher — ...who held anti-Wentworth attitudes — to the governorship of Massachusetts and New Hampshire forced the Wentworth supporters into the background as Belcher appointees displaced them from positions of power and influence in the colony. From this point on, the Wentworth faction — portraying Belcher as unsympathetic, prejudiced, and tyrannical — sought a separate governor for the colony.... With goals such as new western lands, a separate governor, and domination of New Hampshire politics guiding them, this faction sought to force the boundary dispute before the Privy Council, displaying an unwillingness to compromise at any other level. Their determined opportunism brought success, for in 1740 the Privy Council awarded them wider bounds than they had sought, opening the western lands between the Merrimack and Connecticut Rivers to the New Hampshire settlers. According to Frances Wilks, the Massachusetts agent in London, the Privy Council awarded New Hampshire the victory because it looked upon the dispute as between Mass. and the Crown, and therefore, "Whatever was not granted to us [Massachusetts] belonged to the Crown." To Wilks the key factor in this loss was official bias against Massachusetts in England.

Van Deventer, 76-77.

Task Five: The NH–MA Boundary Dispute

Read the passage below and describe in detail the major shakeup of colonial government in 1741 and what this meant for New Hampshire.

Within a year of the Privy Council’s decision on the boundary dispute,

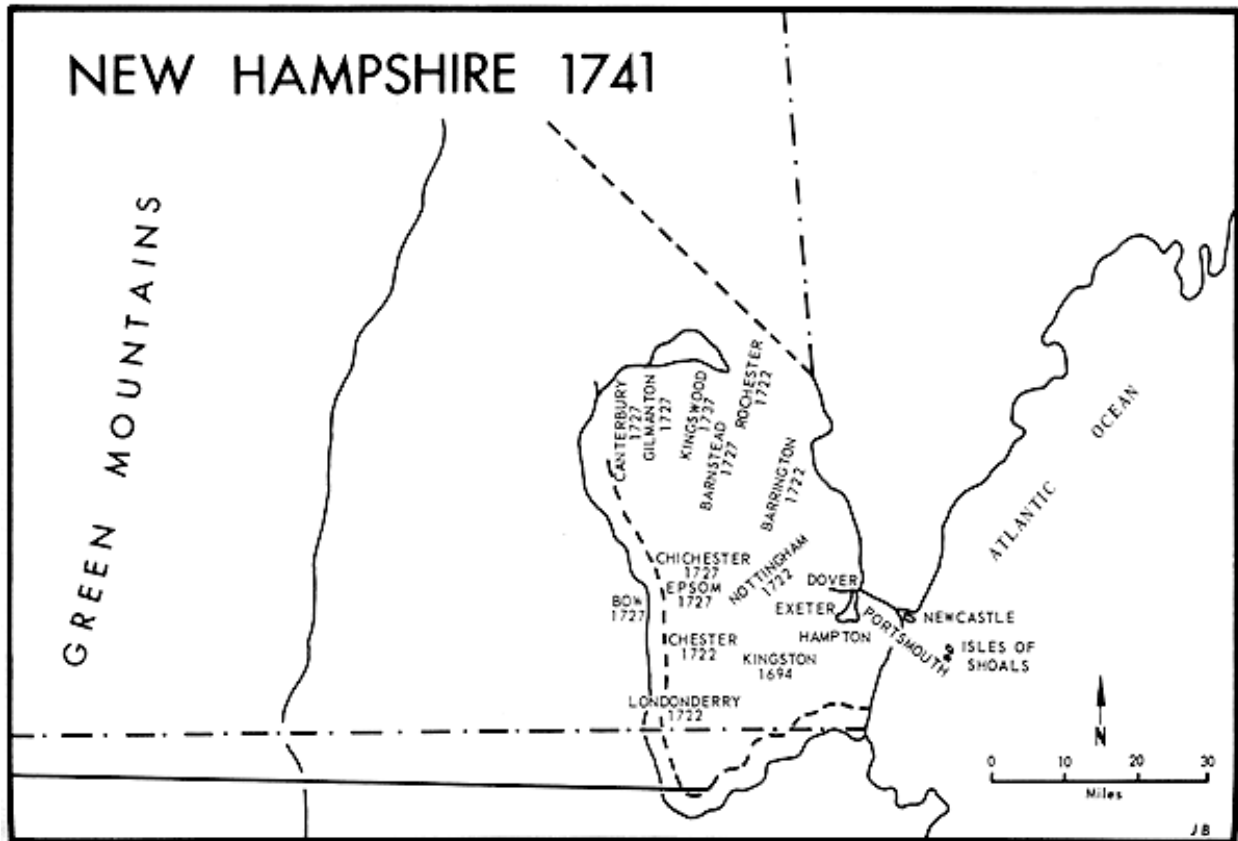
the Wentworth faction turned to the London mast contractors for support. Benning Wentworth and John Thomlinson persuaded ...the mast contractor for the Royal Navy ...to join them and other London merchants in a petition for the appointment of a separate governor for New Hampshire as the only way “to keep that province from sinking and to make it a useful and flourishing colony.” This petition and agent Thomlinson’s varied connections and skills made the difference. In August 1741, Benning Wentworth was commissioned governor of New Hampshire. He returned home to establish a new political order in the colony — a monopolization of political power never before seen in New Hampshire but nevertheless acceptable to the inhabitants.

Van Deventer, 77-78

Task Six: The NH–MA Boundary Dispute

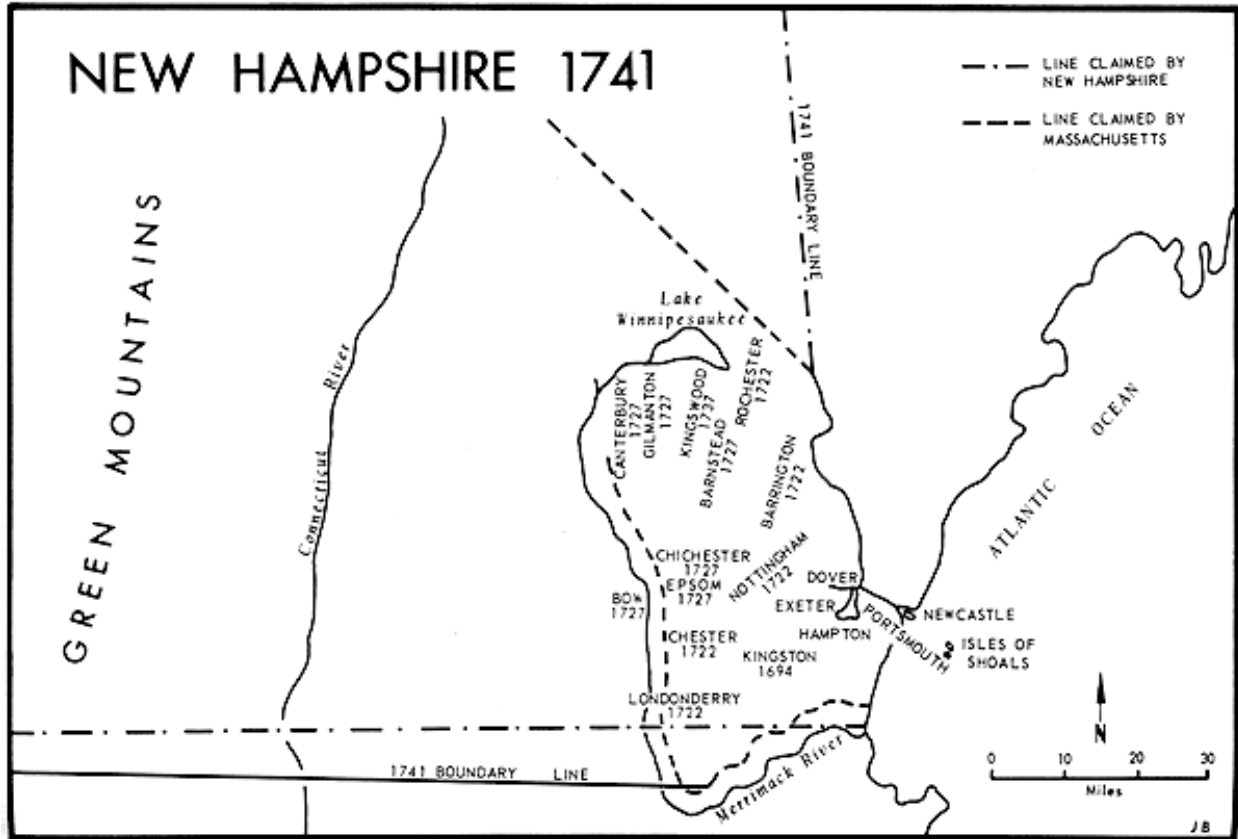
Using the map below pencil in the following additional information:

- the Connecticut River;
- the Merrimack River;
- Lake Winnepesaukee;
- the identification key for the boundary line claimed by Massachusetts;
- the identification key for the boundary line claimed by New Hampshire;
- the boundary line in 1741.



Adapted from Van Deventer, 73.

Map with Identifying Names



Van Deventer, 73.

Curriculum Information

Information relating to the *New Hampshire History Curriculum* refers to the K-12 resource in two volumes developed by the New Hampshire Historical Society in partnership with Public Service of New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Department of Education, and the New Hampshire Council for the Social Studies. The K-6 volume is available on-line through the school programs section of the Society's Web site (<http://www.nhhistory.org>).

Grade Level

High School

New Hampshire Social Studies Standards

Geography 1, 2, 4; US/NH History 1, 2, 5

New Hampshire History Curriculum Focus Topics

Boundaries

New Hampshire History Curriculum Eras

1623–1763: Colonization and Settlement