

## Dividing the Land in Norwich

In the Town Clerk's Office is a copy of the earliest proprietors' records. It was made from a copy, not the original, which is in Dartmouth College's Rauner Special Collections Library. Its catalog entry there is Norwich, Vt. Proprietors' Records [1761-1770]. It is made from an 1877 transcription.

Where the original copy of these early records is we do not know.

Norwich's copy is in a thin binder shelved in the Town Clerk's vault, along with with a bound volume of proprietors' records, which cover later dates.

Interspersed below are notes taken from the Goddard-Partridge history of Norwich which are separated from the text of the early records by hatch marks (#).

Page 1-2. August 26, 1761. Connecticut. 8th Item: Committee: Captain Abner Barker, Andrew Crocker, Adoniram Grant, Solomon Wales, and Amos Fellows, to allot some of the lands . . . as soon as may [be]." 9th Item: That the committee should allot to each proprietor an equal share of the intervale by the river. 10th Item: In regard to the number of acres in the share of the second division it is left discretionary with the committee. 13th Item: The committee should lay out the one acre lots according to the direction of the grant.

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Goddard-Partridge history (page 17) says that at first meeting of proprietors in Mansfield, Connecticut, a committee of five was chosen to make a partial survey and allotments of lands in the new township. See page 17 for a brief explanation of the procedure of settling.

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Page 2. January 4, 1762. Connecticut. Item 7: The tenth lot in second division . . . should be reserved for the proprietors to dispose of hereafter as they should think proper.

Page 3. September 15, 1762. Connecticut. Item 1: Proprietors of Norwich should join with proprietors in other towns in clearing a road

from Fort No. 4 (Charlestown, N.H.) on the east side of the river as far up the river as a committee to be chose shall think proper.

Page 3. Last Tuesday of November 1762. Connecticut. Voted to confirm all earlier votes except those respecting the allotment and division of lands . . . which are not understood to be ratified by this vote, but to be null and void as they were never transmitted to any legal clerk under oath to record . . . . Adjudged to be illegal and uncertain . . . and because they tend to impede and retard the settlement of the town.

Page 4. November 15, 1762. Connecticut. Item 5: Voted the 1st and 2nd divisions as laid out by the committee shall be bounded as follows: To begin at the south east corner of Norwich, thence to extend west one mile and a half on the town line, thence northerly 'til it comes to the north . . ? . . eight rods from Connecticut River.

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Goddard-Partridge history (page 17) says that a survey party was sent out (1762) and that part of the town adjacent to the Connecticut River was laid out into lots. (First division) One lot of 100 acres was assigned to each proprietor plus an equal share of the land along river as had previously been determined.

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Page 4. April 4, 1763. Connecticut. 2nd and 3rd Items: Discuss what inducements could be made to provide for 25 men who might be persuaded to settle in Norwich and clear and improve an amount of land, etc.

Page 5. 5th and 6th items concern idea that the first settlers should not settle in places that would hinder the second division or future land divisions. Settlers have liberty to choose 100 acre lots anywhere if it does not incommode any future divisions . . . .

Page 5. May 12, 1763 Connecticut. Concerns planning if fewer than 25 men agree to settle.

Page 6. January 18, 1764. Connecticut. Item 3: Voted that the division as laid out by the committee be bounded as follows: To begin

at the southeast corner of Norwich by Connecticut River and to extend westerly one mile and 8 rods as the town line runs. Thence northerly in a straight line until it comes to the north side of the north lot, one mile & 8 rods from Connecticut River. Now voted that this vote be reconsidered. Adjourned until 2nd Tuesday of March.

Page 7. March 13, 1765. Connecticut. Item 3: Concerns the river lots. To alter the river lots if they think it best and bound them on the river and lay out 100 acre lots--a lot to each proprietor's right and lay out roads as they shall think best. Item 8: Any proprietor that goes this year shall have his 100 acres and shall do two months work upon his right by the last day of October next from the date hereof. Committee: Jacob Burton, Hezekiah Johnson, Samuel Fenton, John Hatch, John Slafter.

# # # # #

The Goddard-Partridge history (page 18-19) says that in March 1765 a committee, with John Hatch (as surveyor), were to make a further division of 100-acre lots and to lay out roads as they shall think best convenience of settling the township. In June 1765 they proceeded to re-survey and lay out 68 river lots, one to every proprietor's right, each 25 rods, 4 links wide and 160 rods in length from east to west along the banks of the river. 80 100-acre lots in 5 tiers of sixteen lots each, lying directly west of the lots just named. Between the second and third tier of 100-acre lots, a highway, six rods wide, was located, and between the fourth and fifth tiers and eight-rod highway, for the whole distance of five miles north and south. Land was also left between every second lot for highways running east and west across the town.

# # # # #

Page 8-9. July 28, 1768. Meeting at Jacob Burton's house in Norwich. Item 3: Doings of the committee received and accepted. To allot the river lots and re-lay them and to leave lands for highways between as should be thought best . . . lay out 100 acre to each proprietor's right . . . lay out highways as was for convenience of settling. (See copy for exactly what was decided by committee. Samuel Fenton's signature not in report.) 5th Item: Voted to lay out

2nd division of hundred acre lots upon each proprietor's right. 8th Item: Voted all legal proprietors should have the liberty formerly granted in pitching hundred acre lots until first day of January next either upon the hundred acre lots laid out.

(Paul Gillies describes "pitching" thus: "People moved to the Grants and began clearing land, without regard to the existence of a charter or any claim to a particular lot. Sometimes they were proprietors, ahead of the pack, anxious to get settled; sometimes they were simply squatters. Settling without a lot was called "pitching." A copy of the Gillies article from the Vermont Bar Journal is included with this material.

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Goddard-Partridge says (page 19), committee for laying out lot and highways made a formal report which was approved and their report by the surveyor, John Hatch, was accepted.

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Page 10. June 1770. Item 2: Voted that the doings of the committee in laying out the 2nd division of hundred acre lots was received and accepted. Item 3: To draft the 2nd division of hundred acre lots, John Hatch, Samuel Partridge, Medad Benton were selected. Also to draft out the 1st division of hundred acre lots that are not pitched.

Page 11. September 17, 1770. Norwich. Item 4: Voted to lay out all the undivided land in Norwich. Item 5: Committee to do this and report in 14 months. John Hatch, Hezekiah Johnson, Peter Thatcher, John Slafter, John Wright, Samuel Partridge, Samuel Waterman, Jr.

# # # # #

Goddard-Partridge history (page 19). This is the last meeting of the proprietors, of which any record has been found. It was voted to lay out into lots all the undivided land in town and John Hatch, Captain Hezekiah Johnson, Peter Thatcher, John Slafter, John Wright, Samuel Partridge, and Samuel Waterman were chosen a committee to do this.

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At the end of these records is a note by William E. Lewis, Town Clerk, certifying the text as a true copy taken from the proprietors'

original records now in the Town Clerk's office. June 2, 1877.  
 (Another date appears near the fold: August 17, 1892. Meaning?) Is  
 Lewis referring to a copy? If not, where are these original records for  
 the early period?

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The following notes are taken from the bound volume entitled  
Norwich Town Meeting Records, 1778+ They fill some of the gap  
 until the record of the Book of the Proprietors of Norwich takes over.  
 And they also add another perspective to the story.

At the front of the volume are several pages illustrating the cattle and  
 sheep marks, indicating owners, There are then notes beginning with  
 August 26, 1761+. These notes are not a copy of the proprietors'  
 records. They concern a largely different group of people. The  
 proprietors were the persons in Connecticut to whom Norwich was  
 chartered by the royal governor of the Province of New Hampshire,  
 Benning Wentworth. The proprietors were, as a rule, older individuals  
 and of some substance; few ever became actual settlers. The  
 Goddard-Partridge history, on page 15, lists the names of the  
 grantees of Norwich, a total of 63 names. This list does not include  
 one whole share for the Society for Propagating the Gospel in  
 Foreign Parts, one whole share for the Glebe share for the Church of  
 England, one share for the first settled minister, and one share for a  
 school. Benning Wentworth received his usual 500 acres.

The proprietors (paraphrasing the Goddard and Partridge history) had  
 a number of conditions to meet in order to retain their charter. For  
 example, each one had, within five years, to clear and cultivate five  
 acres of land, and continue to improve. These terms are written out in  
 the town's charter. As well, they had to enlist the men to do the  
 actual settling and these are the persons who lived with the daily  
 practicalities of creating the settlement and providing its working  
 rules, building its highways, schools, and church. They are the group  
 whose story is documented in the volume, Norwich Town Meeting  
 Records, 1778+.

The account focuses on highways, not so much on the process of  
 laying out of land, i.e., ranges, lots, and divisions. They talk about

constructing a bridge at Pompanoosuc and the electing of town officers, the same positions they had known in Mansfield, Connecticut, like the overseer of the poor.

As time passes, there is regular discussion of political conditions, military affairs, scouting parties, conditions in "the Grants." How to raise a body of men to guard the frontier, and develop the response to the coming of war with all it implied.

And the more mundane: construction of a meeting house, regular attempts to keep hogs, and other grazing animals off the town common, discussions with Hanover and the infant college about a ferry across the Connecticut.

Page 5. March 9, 1773 . Item 10: John Hatch appointed surveyor to attend the commissioners of highways.

Page 9. December 31, 1778. Items 4 to 8 concerns highways.

Page 20. February 1, 1781. Item 11: Ordered the town clerk to take a new copy of the charter of this town & enter the same in the records of this town.

Page 30. November 30, 1781. Item 3: Having also considered the doings of the proprietors relative to lands left for highways--Voted it to be unanimously our opinion that the same is left purely for the benefit & to be at the disposal of the town for the purpose of having roads laid as may best accommodate it--and to be exchanged wherefore as occasion shall require. Item 4: voted that the select men for the time being be desired & empowered to exchange & dispose of lands left for highways agreeable to the last meeting's vote.

Page 51. March 13, 1784. Item 12: Voted that the select men be directed to make a proper division to districts for repairing the highways and make the rate bill for that purpose.

Page 65. May 11, 1786. Item 2: That this town will not raise money to pay the expense of surveying the out lines of the town. Item 3: Voted that there be a committee appointed to draft a petition to send

to governor. Item 4: Appointed committee for the purpose. (General Olcott, William Lewis, Paul Brigham, Daniel Buck, Elisha Burton, Timothy Bush, Joseph Hatch, Captain Gates) they to make a report in half a year. and also meet other towns and join and petition the governor. The committee made its report and the town voted to accept it. A committee was appointed to join with other towns and to forward the petition to the governor. Item 5: Paul Brigham, Daniel Buck, Elisha Burton, and Captain Timothy Bush were appointed.

Page 66. January 2, 1787. Item 2: Voted to see if Norwich would confer with Thetford about perambulating town lines.

Page 67. March 20, 1787. Item 10: Chose committee of five to assist the town clerk in recording the Survey Bill of Highways.

Page 148. March 18, 1806. On the town meeting agenda was To see if the town will agree to take the necessary measures to enable the town to take advantage of the act passed at the last session of the Assembly with respect to the Glebe rights of land in the state and to see if the town will petition the Assembly to pass a law to legalize the division of lands in town.

Page 151. March 26, 1806. Voted to pass over the fourth article in the warning and the old committee which was appointed to assist the proprietors' committee in completing a new plan for the division of lands in town is requested to examine and see if any proper plan can be found on which the third hundred acre lot of the glebe might and can be located and report to some future meeting.

Page 154. June 26, 1806. Item 2: To see if the inhabitant land owners will accept the report of a committee appointed . . . some years since to join a committee from the proprietors . . . to draw a plan conformable to the original vote of the proprietors to allot and divide the township which report is now ready to accept or reject--if rejected to see what measures the land owners will enter into and ascertain their decisions.. Item 3: To see if the inhabitants will join with the proprietors in preparing a petition to the legislature at their next October session for [an] act of the legislature to legalize the division of land in this township.

Page 418. March 18, 1806. Item 4: To see if town will petition and take the necessary means to take advantage of the act to allow the town to make a new division of its lands.

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Following are notes from the volume **A Book of Records for the Proprietors of Norwich..** The first page is page 2, page one being absent.

Page 2. October 23, 1795. Item 3: to see if they will complete the surveying of the town and ascertain what lands there are and make a division.

Page 2-3. January 1, 1796. Item 3: concerned attempt to obtain the proprietors' records from John Hatch, late proprietors' clerk, and Jacob Burton. Committee of Joseph Lewis, William Lewis, Paul Brigham to meet with them. Item 4: Voted the clerk be directed to make a new and accurate plan of the division of land. Item 5: Paul Brigham, Elisha Burton, and John Bush Esq. are a committee to assist the clerk (Asahel Lewis is now proprietors' clerk.) complete the plan. Item 6: Every pitch of land that is a legal return made and the land that is under settlement by work done on that land and the man does rightfully own should be recorded on proprietors' records.

Page 3. May 10, 1796. Item 2: Voted that there be a committee of three to completely ascertain what lands have been laid out by the direction and authority of the proprietors and determine the quantity of undivided land and also lay out any three hundred which may be wanting to complete that division to any delinquent right and also ascertain whether any and what quantity of land has been laid out by individuals to any right more than the just proportion to any such right and complete plan of said town. Item 3: Elisha Whitcomb, Asahel Lewis, Paul Brigham to carry out Item 2.

Page 4-5. September 22, 1796. Conflict with Jacob Burton continues during this period. He refused to give up proprietors' records.

Various postponed meetings.



Page 5. First Tuesday of October 1797. Vote taken in January 1796 to appoint Brigham, Burton, and Bush a committee to assist the clerk in completing a plan of town. was reconsidered and the committee is hereby discharged from further service. Set later date for next meeting but this was rescheduled several times.

Page 6. 1st day of June 1798. Moved to June 17th. Item 1: Long discussion of land work. Concerns the 8, 9, 10 ranges. Side lines of lots required to be run. Gives rules of running them and enter in Field Book.

Page 7. In court regarding Jacob Burton's refusal to give up proprietors' records.

Page 8. First Tuesday of July 1799. 1st. Voted to chose an addition to the land committee to ascertain the lands already laid out and find what will be the equal shares of land remaining. 2nd. Pierce Burton named to the committee. 3d. Voted to adjourn until the second Tuesday of November 1799. Adjourned again to third Tuesday of December 1799. Met on December 17, 1799. This meeting adjourned until third Tuesday January, 1800.

Page 9. January 21, 1800. Item 1: Voted to accept the doings of the committee in making out the division of the 300 acre lots to the Field Book. **Is this the third division?**

Page 9-10. Item 2: Concerns land in northern part of town, to examine the lines and if there is any mistake notify as necessary. Item 3: To adjourn meeting to last Tuesday in June.

Page 9-10. June 24, 1800. First voted that lines run by the committee is accepted and allowed to be the ranging line for 8, 9, 10 ranges, and also the 1-7 ranges from the 15 lot to Thetford line to be the lines for the ranges. Adjourned until last Tuesday in August. Adjourned to second Tuesday of August, 1800. Adjourned until second Tuesday of October.

Page 10-11. October 14, 1800. Each proprietor is at liberty to pitch his land any time now. and the first Tuesday of January next not

interfering on any other pitch and laying their pitch parallel with ranging lines on the . . ? . . lines..

Page 11. August 27 1806. Warn meeting for October 11, 1806. Item 2: To see if proprietors will join land owners to offer a petition to the legislature to pass an act to enable the proprietors and land owners to make and establish their divisions of land.

Page 12. October 11, 1806. Item 2: To see if proprietors and land owners will join in a petition to the legislature. Item 3: Committee to examine the petition to be composed of John Slafter, Pierce Burton, Asahel Lewis. Item 4: Daniel Buck, Esq., to be their agent with legislature which is to be meeting in October 1806. Item 6: Those that have land that is not laid out may have liberty to pitch the same on any vacant land until the next meeting.

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THE ACTS AND LAWS, PASSED BY THE LEGILATURE OF THE STATE OF VERMONT, IN OCTOBER 1806. (which extended into early November) record on page 125-126, Chapter 91, "An act to authorize the proprietors and land owners of Norwich, to establish the division of their lands. The Preamble reads: "Whereas the proprietors of Norwich, have heretofore made an actual division of their lands into severalty, the record of which has, by accident, been destroyed. To remedy which, Sec. 1. It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont, That the Proprietors and land owners of the township of Norwich be, and they are hereby authorized and empowered to make cut a list, exhibiting each proprietor's name . . . , "The act was dated November 7, 1806.

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### **A Book of Records for the Proprietors of Norwich**

Page 12. December 6, 1806. Item 1: Voted to choose a committee of three to examine the pitches and them that are fit for entry have them

recorded. Item 2: Chose Asahel Lewis, Pierce Burton, and John Slafter as the committee.

Page 13. January 1, 1807. Voted to choose a committee to meet with a committee from the land owners to examine the plans & accounts of the proprietors and regulate the same as far as they can. They chose John Slafter, Pierce Burton, and Asahel Lewis.

Page 13. March 5, 1807. Item 1: Voted that the committee appointed to regulate the plan be directed to run any lines that is necessary in finding any lands in the survey of them. Item 2: To adjourn meeting to first Tuesday of June next.

Page 14. November 15 1807. Item 3: To see if proprietors will ratify and confirm heretofore made on the last division of the proprietors and make a division of the remaining part. Item 4: To see if the proprietors will take any measure to get possession of any lands which may belong to the proprietors.

Page 14. On November 15, 1807. Item 3: Voted to choose a committee of three to examine the records to ascertain the pitches that has been made and ascertain the undivided land not taken up and make a report at the next meeting. Chose Pierce Burton, Jeremiah Bissell, John Slafter Jr.

Page 15. December 6, 1814. Item 1: Voted that all pitches of last division previously made legally and entered on the town or proprietors' records agreeable to a former vote of the proprietors-- be entered on the plan of the town by the committee appointed to ascertain the pitches and to ascertain undivided lands in town. Item 2 Proprietors have leave to pitch the fourth division any time between the 6th day of December 1814 and the first day of April 1815 next.. Item 3: Voted to adjourn until the first Tuesday of April next (1815).

Page 15. April 4, 1815. Item 1: Voted that the proprietors have leave to pitch the fourth division anytime between the fourth day of April , 1815, and the first Tuesday of June next. Laying it parallel with the town line leaving allowance for highways. Item 2: Voted to adjourn until the first Tuesday of June next.

Page 16. June 6, 1815. Item 1: Voted that proprietors have leave to pitch the fourth or last division any time between the 6<sup>th</sup> day of June 1815 and the first day of December next, laying it out parallel with the town line leaving allowance for highways. Item 2: Voted to adjourn until the 6<sup>th</sup> day of December next.

Page 16. December 6, 1815. Item 1: Voted to adjourn meeting until last Friday of February 1816.

Page 16. February 23, 1816. Item 2: Voted that the proprietors have leave to pitch the last division from the 23 day of February to the next meeting . Voted to adjourn until the second day of December next.

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In A Book of Records for the Proprietors of Norwich pages 18 -49 are blank. Pages 50-59, prefaced by a note at the beginning and at the end, lists the proprietors and land received in divisions 1, 2, and 3. It is not dated and is signed by Paul Brigham, John Slafter, Pierce Burton, and Hezekiah Goodrich.

Pages 60-63 are blank.

On page 64-66 is the record of river lots. 160 rods in length and 24 rods and 4 links in width.

On page 67 is a warning for a meeting, November 20, 1811, of proprietors and land owners. This warning was signed by Sherman Dewey, Justice Peace, at Hartford. Article 3 is to see if they will ratify and confirm either in whole or in part the several divisions of land as heretofore made and located by the proprietors agreeable to the plan and list which will be exhibited . . . which list and plan have been made in conformity to an act of the legislature passed at their session held at Middlebury AD 1806..

Page 67-68. Following this is a note: At a meeting of the proprietors and land owners of the Town of Norwich held at the meeting house in Norwich on January 12, 1812, pursuant to the foregoing warning. Article 2 of the meeting was to adjourn the meeting for a fortnight.

Page 68. The meeting was held on February 3, 1812. A committee of five was appointed to examine the plans and compare list of river lots, and the three hundred acre lots to each right and see if they agree with the other committee chosen: Joseph Howes, Samuel Gleason, Paul Brigham, Constant Murdoch, John Brown. . . . which committee reported in the presence of the meeting that the list prepared aforesaid were accurate as far as they were reported and a motion was made and seconded to accept and ratify the same whereupon the meeting voted to accept ratify and confirm the plan and list of river lots as entered in this book on pages 84, 85, and 86. The plan was accepted but not without dissent (see page 67-69).

Query: where is there a plan showing the fourth division laid out as a result of the Vermont law passed in 1806 though not acted upon for several years?

#### Other Sources of Information

Volume 3 of the Land Records, Page 105-166.

Norwich Town Clerk's Office. September 19, 1808. Received the following tax bill of one cent on each acre of land . . . (granted by the General Assembly at their session held in Woodstock in October 1807 for the purpose of building a state prison) Lists the land owners and identifies their properties. Shown are three land divisions. Paul Brigham, Clerk. Hezekiah Goodrich, Joseph Loveland, Daniel Waterman, select men.

Note that the Survey of the Highways. Book on page 1, June 18, 1768, refers to Blood Brook.