

## **A Brief History of Moultonborough**

### *Who Was the Founder, and How Did the Town Get Its Name?*

The town is named after Jonathan Moulton, and it has always been called Moultonborough. This is the “official” spelling, although the post office and some businesses use the shorter version.

Jonathan Moulton was born in Hampton, NH in 1726. His parents were poor, and he was apprenticed to a cabinetmaker. He then became an Indian scout and probably saw the Moultonborough area. He started his own business, and became a dealer in goods imported from England and the West Indies. In 1764 he bought a lot of goods from a ship that was wrecked near Great Boar’s Head, on the NH seacoast, and made a good profit. He married Abigail Smith in 1749, and they had 11 children. He was a captain during the French and Indian Wars, and was a representative to the legislature from Hampton and later Moulton-borough. He was a Brigadier General in the State Militia in 1775, and fought at the battle of Sara-toga in 1777.

He invested in land in the new towns that were being developed in the state, including Moultonborough, New Hampton, Tamworth, Center Harbor, and Sandwich, and owned 80,000 acres at the time of his death. Some people have accused him of being less than completely honest, or at least a very clever businessman, in accumulating his land and fortune. He lived in a large house in Hampton (picture). His first house burned down in 1769, but even his second house was said to be one of the finest in the state prior to the Revolution. There are stories of the supernatural associated with Jonathan, and one is that he sold his soul to the devil for all the gold his riding boots could hold, and then cut the toes out of them, so that the gold would keep pouring in. When this was discovered, the Devil caused Jonathan’s fine mansion to burn to the ground, the gold being lost in the fire.

His wife died in 1775, and he remarried and had four more children. His second wife, Sarah Emery, was much younger than he, and legend has it that he took the rings from the fingers of his first wife when she died and gave them to the second, but that on their wedding night, the ghost of Abigail came and took the rings from

Sarah's fingers. This was written up in a poem by John Greenleaf Whittier, "The New Wife and the Old". His house was thought by later owners to be haunted. He died in 1787, aged 61, and some legends also have it that he was poisoned by a French visitor who felt that Moulton had cheated him in selling him a house.

*When and how the town was first established?*

After the French and Indian War ended in 1763, it became safe for the people in towns closer to the seacoast to move inland.

Jonathan Moulton had visited in the area during the wars, and he organized a group of 62 investors, mostly from the town of Hampton, to request a grant of the town from the Masonian Proprietors, who were selling land based on a grant given by the King to a man named John Mason back in the 1600's. The Masonian Proprietors kept 20 of the original 82 shares of land, which they thought would be worth money when the town was developed. Jonathan Moulton and others came up here and surveyed the boundaries of the town, and laid out lots for each of the investors. In 1765 the land which is now Center Harbor and New Hampton was added to Moultonborough by Royal Governor Benning Wentworth. Legend has it that Jonathan Moulton helped make this possible by the gift of a 1400 pound ox to the Governor. New Hampton became a separate town in 1777, and Center Harbor in 1779. Long Island was added to the town by the state legislature in 1799.

The town was incorporated by the state legislature in 1777, and the first Town Meeting was held in 1778. The Revolutionary War was going on at this time, and many men from Moultonborough were soldiers, especially at the Battle of Bennington.

There were 62 men, including Jonathan Moulton, who owned land in the town after it was granted to them by the Masonian Proprietors. Few of them ever lived in the town. They had to settle 20 families in the town within one year, who had houses and were clearing and cultivating the land, and 15 more families in two years, another 15 in three years, and ten more in four years, or they would lose their grant. They also had to build a meeting-house and have a minister of the gospel within six years. And because the town was granted while the state was still a colony of England, all the white pine trees suitable for the royal navy were reserved for the king. To meet these conditions, they offered money to people to come and live in the town and start their farms. By 1773, there were 44 men in the

town, over 200 acres of land in crops or pasture, five horses, 20 oxen, and over 100 cows. By 1850, there were over 200 farms in the town, with horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, poultry, and growing corn, potatoes, wheat, and hay for the animals. The population of the town in 1840 was 1,752. Because of the Civil War, and because the farmers moved out West where the land was better, or moved to the cities and found work in the mills, the population of the town became less and less over the years. Not until 1980 did the population exceed what it was in 1840. By 1820 there were nine school-houses in various parts of town.