

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

Introduction

Why risk coming to the frontier of mid-coast Maine in 1735? After nearly 60 years of warfare with native Americans, which drove out any would be permanent settlers, and with the “French and Indian War” on the horizon, Timothy Dunton chose to come here to start a new life. Born in Sudbury Massachusetts in 1715, Timothy was only 20 years old when he decided to move to mid-coast Maine. He was, however, a big and strong young man who was good with an ax. He also planned to marry soon and start a family.

The Clark and Lake Proprietors claimed the land called “Nequasset” (now Woolwich) based on an old deed signed with the Abnaki leader called Robinhood (Mowhotiwormet) in 1639. Having rediscovered the old deed, held by their ancestors, and with hostility with the natives easing, Clark and Lake began to recruit settlers like Timothy with the promise of free land in exchange for clearing a farm site, building a dwelling, and working the land for at least six years. This was appealing to Timothy. He was planning to marry Elizabeth and start a new life. Why not on the frontier?



Figure 1 – Parcel 39 of Clark and Lake Plat Selected by Timothy Dunton in Woolwich in 1735

Timothy Dunton Heads to Woolwich

Timothy and Elizabeth were granted lot 29, a 100-acre parcel, on the west side of Brookings Bay across from Phips Point. They started their family and, by 1740, had two sons, Joseph and John. Another child was on the way. He and his neighbor, Henry Brookings, who both had farms on Brookings Bay (then called Hadley Bay), were good loggers. In 1740, they took a sloop load of lumber to Newburyport to sell. The logging business was promising.



Timothy’s thoughts turned to the prospect of providing good farm land nearby for his sons. Expansion options for his farm in Woolwich were limited due to Clark and Lake’s subdivision plans, which boxed him in.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth’s thoughts may have turned to safety. Wabanaki raiding parties were still threatening Woolwich. The “French and Indian War” was looming. Their good friend Henry Brookings was killed in a raid by Wabanakis, along with two

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

neighbors, while gathering his sheep in 1744. This made it clear that a permanent move to safer environs was well warranted!

Timothy had been attracted to the more secure land around Squam Creek on nearby Jeremysquam Island (now Westport Island). There were no settlers evident, and no known active claims on the land. The land seemed to be there for the asking. He may not have been aware, however, that a deed with Native Americans was signed in 1664 by George Davie, then of Wiscasset. A new group of proprietors, the “Wiscasset and Jeremisquam Proprietors” of Boston planned to exploit that old deed. These proprietors were starting to organize their land selling plans when Timothy moved to Jeremysquam Island.

In addition, the “Kennebec Proprietors” had dusted off an old and questionable land grant from the English King for rights to the land within 15 miles of either side of the Kennebec River given to the Plymouth Colony. That included Westport Island. The Kennebec Proprietors located their business in “Pownelborough” at what is now Dresden’s “Pownelborough Court House” under the leadership of Samuel Goodwin. These proprietors were soon to torment early settlers throughout the mid-coast, including Timothy and Elizabeth Dunton and their sons.

Resettlement on Jeremysquam Island at Squam Creek

It’s likely that Timothy and Elizabeth kept one foot in Woolwich and one foot in Jeremysquam while Timothy cleared the land around Squam Creek and built a suitable dwelling for his growing family. As was customary for settlers, he claimed only as much land as he could manage. For Timothy, that was initially about 70 acres. However, there was land for his sons just to the south and to the east that he could, and would, expand onto.

Were Timothy and Elizabeth and family the first permanent settlers on Westport Island? If not *the* first, they were certainly one of the first. The earliest record of settlers was from 1751 in a map drawn by John North. Four families were noted; Joseph Decker at the north end, Timothy Dunton at Squam Creek, Dennis Linnekin on the east shore and the “Witham Camp” at the south end. The Dunton family settlement on Squam Creek has endured for six generations and for nearly 200 years.

Table 1 – Timothy and Elizabeth’s Family

Timothy and Elizabeth had 8 children, including 6 sons and 2 daughters. 5 sons settled initially on Westport Island adjacent to, or near the family farm. Land settled by 4 sons,

Joseph	Born: about 1736	Married: Abigail (maiden name unknown)
John	Born: about 1738	Married: Abigail Walker
Samuel	Born: 1745	Married: Lydia Crosby
Elizabeth	Born: (Unknown)	Married: Andrew Grant
Sarah	Born; 24 Oct 1749	Married: John Knight
Abner	Born: 1751	Married: Mary Quinn
Timothy Jr.	Born: 1752	Married: Nancy Smith
Daniel	Born: 1755	Married: Abigail Snell

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–*Westport Island's Earliest Permanent Settler Family?*

(Joseph, John, Samuel and Daniel) were adjacent to each other, making a 700-acre family compound. The map below shows the pattern of Dunton family settlement, starting in Nequasset (Woolwich) and relocating to Jeremysquam Island (Westport Island).

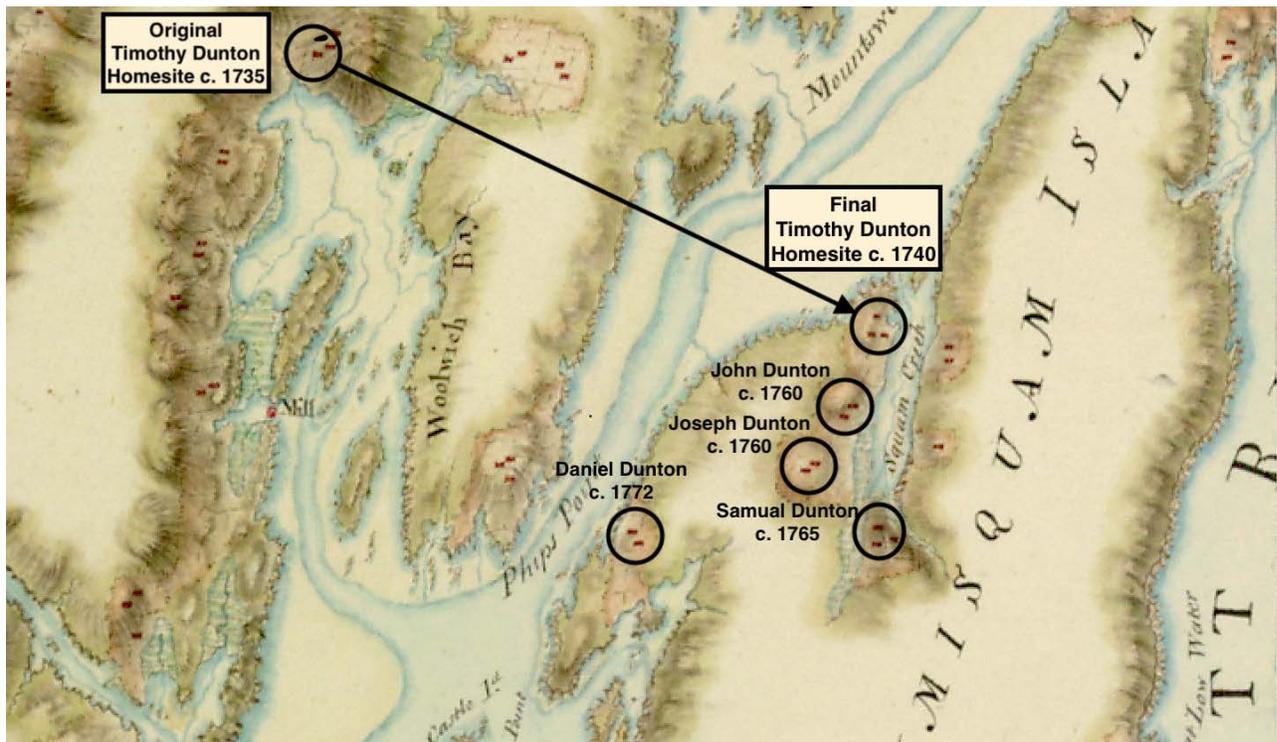


Figure 2 - Dunton Family Migration from Woolwich and their Adjacent Farms on Westport Island as shown on an underlying map by Ensign George Sproul of the British Royal navy in 1772.

The current “Carl and Barbara Segerstrom Preserve at Squam Creek” now protects part of Timothy’s original farm as well John and Joseph Dunton’s farms, and the cellar holes of several descendants.

Timothy and Elizabeth may have acquired their land with an understanding with the Kennebec Proprietors. However, troubles with other “Great Proprietors” started in 1768, when he was sued by Thomas Hubbard, one of the Wiscasset and Jeremysquam Proprietors, for building on “his” land. Timothy apparently reached a settlement, and Hubbard relinquished his claim. Then, in 1777, Gideon Harlow asserted his own claim of ownership and Timothy had to purchase a “Quit Claim” deed to clear Harlow’s claim.

Hostility between early settlers like the Dunton’s and the Great Proprietors grew until the State of Massachusetts stepped in to clear-up the mess. They directed towns to survey their land, as it was then occupied, and allowed settlers to gain legal guaranteed title for a payment of 7- and one-half cents per acre. Timothy and his sons happily complied and finally gained clear title!

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

In 1789, at the age of 74, Timothy and Elizabeth bequeathed their home and farm to their grandson, Andrew (John’s son), and they bought land in Boothbay (Sawyer’s Island) to retire to. Timothy is believed to have died in 1805, at age 90, and was buried in John Dunton Jr.’s cemetery. Elizabeth may have lived to 105 according to Dunton family lore.

The Second Generation –Joseph, John, Samuel and Daniel’s Settlement Sites

Joseph - Joseph and his wife, Abigail, settled on about 115 acres at the southern end of Squam Creek. The cellar hole for his home site remains on the Preserve’s southern end (called the Luretta Hodgdon Home Site). He built his home around 1764 and raised his family of 9 children there. In 1791 he sold his land and farm to John Hodgdon. Joseph relocated to Newcastle.

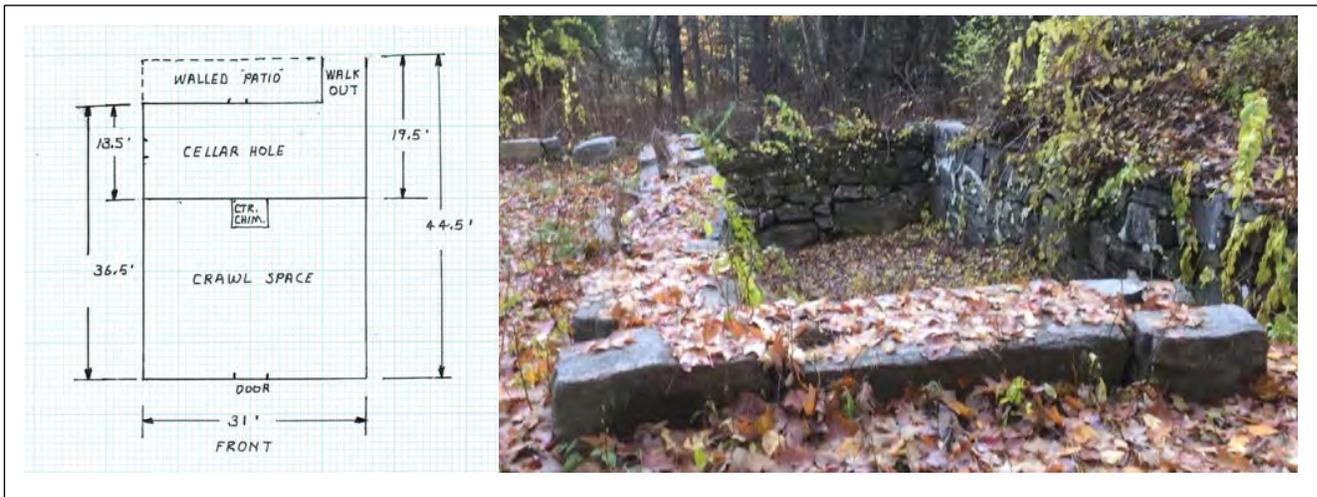


Figure 3 - Joseph Dunton Home Cellar Hole (Last occupied by Luretta Hodgdon)

John Hodgdon remained on Joseph Dunton’s original land and expanded the farm. He remained for the balance of his life and raised several generations of Hodgdon’s on the farm. He was quite close to his neighbor and friend just to the north, John Dunton, having married his daughter, Lucy. John Hodgdon died in 1849 at age 80

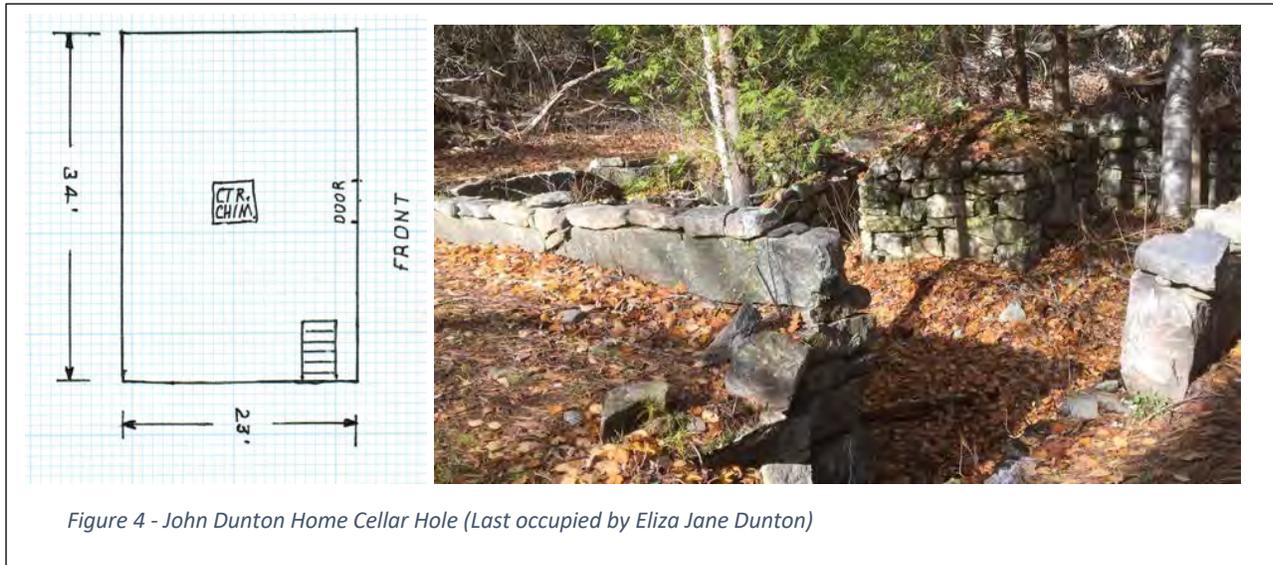
John - John and his wife, Abigail Walker of Woolwich, settled on 130 acres just south of his father Timothy’s land and just north of his brother, Joseph (and later John Hodgdon), where he remained his entire life. John served as a first lieutenant in Captain Thomas Hodgdon’s company (2nd Edgecomb Company) in the Revolutionary War and participated in the Penobscot Expedition. After the death of Abigail Walker, he married Abigail Heal of Georgetown. John and his wives had 14 children to raise at his farm.

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

Upon his death in 1808, his wife Abigail didn’t have the means to run the farm. His neighbor and friend, John Hodgdon, offered to buy a part of his land and Abigail’s share in the house in exchange for a “life estate” in the home until her death. John further agreed to provide:

- One cow each spring for milk and meat
- Part (one third) of the house and barn to live in and store hay and produce
- \$4 per year for expenses



Abigail continued to live in her home and was provided support until her death in 1814.

Upon her death, the land and her son’s share of the home went to Peter Dunton then to Andrew Dunton, who combined it with the land he was given from his grandfather, Timothy.

Samuel – Samuel and his wife Lydia Crosby of Woolwich, settled on 236 acres at the southern end of Squam Creek, between the creek and the Meadow Pond and Anderson Bog wetland. He and Lydia (and possibly a second wife, Prudy) had 8 children. Samuel was active in his Woolwich church.

Daniel – Born in 1755, and the last born in Timothy and Elizabeth’s family, Daniel was last to carve out his land. He settled to the west of Samuel’s land by 1772 on a 150-acre parcel that included what is now Heal Pond and Hubbard Point. Daniel had 9 children with Abigail, and after her death, Hannah and Susannah. Sadly, a woman’s death in childbirth was a far too common event!

Daniel recognized both the need for, and the potential for, tidal power at his family settlement. He planned for a tidal mill at what is now Heal Pond and Cove. By building a dam across the cove, he saw that he could entrap enough water at high tide to power a saw and grist mill. He may have found the cost to construct a mill out of his reach. He sold his rights to the mill site to

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

Levi Shattuck in 1784. Levi Shattuck paid 15 pounds for two parcels (1-acre potential home site and 12 acres around the pond) along with the mill rights. Daniel continued to farm the balance of his land until his death in 1817 at 62 years old.

The map below shows how Timothy and his four sons created a 700-acre family compound on the west side of Squam Creek beginning in 1740 and continuing for nearly 200 years in Dunton family ownership.

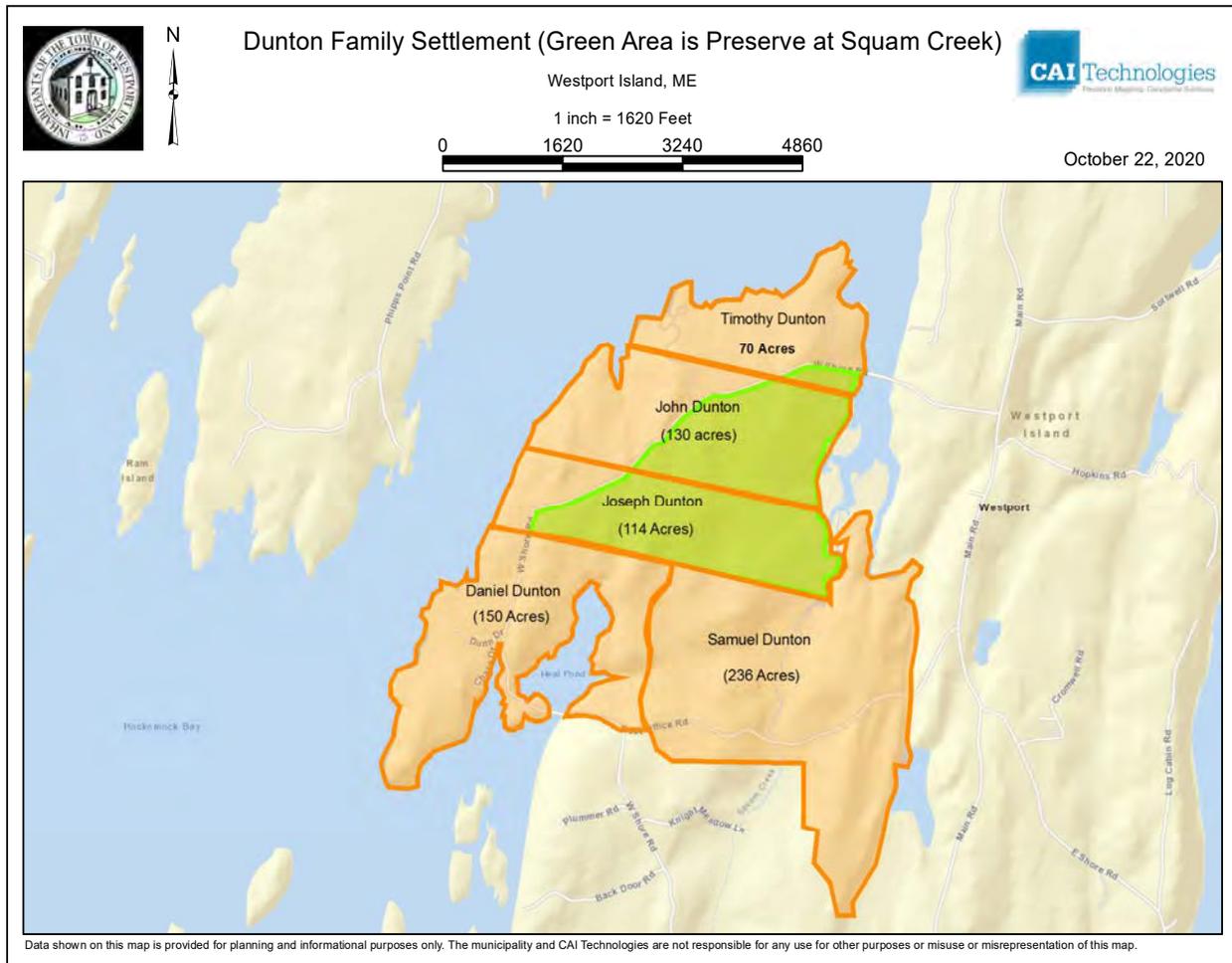


Figure 5 - Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek (Green shaded area is the current land preserve)

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

The Third Generation – Children of John Dunton; John Jr., Andrew and Peter

John Dunton became the elder of the Dunton family. He had 14 children, three of which played key roles in the Squam Creek settlement.

Table 2 – John and Abigail’s Family

Josiah	Born: Unknown	-
Mercy	Born: about 1762	Married: John Heal
Abigail	Born: about 1766	Married: Thomas Hodgdon Jr.
John, Jr.	Born: June 1768	Married: Sarah Greenleaf
Andrew	Born; November 1772	Married: Nancy Dunton
Timothy	Born: 1776	Married: (“three twins”)
Abner	Born: 1779	Died young
Mary	Born: Unknown	Married: Benjamin Bailey
Elizabeth	Born: May 1779	Married: Sam Norton
Peter	Born: 1780	Married: Sarah Pierce Reed
Isaac	Born: Unknown	Married: Abigail Smith of Hope
Josiah	Born: Unknown	-
Sarah	Born: Unknown	Married: James Eliffin
Deborah	Born: January 1774	Married: John Hodgdon

John Jr. – John Dunton, Jr. and his wife, Sarah Greenleaf built their home on the west side of the island on the Sheepscoot River. They had seven children, including Stephen, who would eventually inherit the Squam Creek land previously owned by his grandfather, John Dunton. John Jr. died on June 11, 1853 at age 83. He is buried in his family cemetery. His grandfather Timothy Dunton is said to be buried there as well.

Andrew – Andrew Dunton and his wife Nancy, who was a cousin, was given his grandfather’s original 70 acre farm on Squam Creek when Timothy retired to Boothbay’s Sawyers Island. After his father’s death in 1808, and some transactions within the family, Andrew acquired title to his father John’s 130 acres just to the south. Andrew raised his family on the expanded farm and likely built the house that still stands at “Squam Creek Farm”.

Andrew was a mariner, and was unfortunately lost at sea in 1828 at age 56. His widow, Nancy, remained on the land until her estate was settled.

Peter – Peter and his wife Sarah briefly held title to John Dunton’s land after Abigail died in 1810. However, he found property in Whitefield that was more to his liking. He purchased the Whitefield land and relocated there.

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

The Fourth Generation – Stephen and Hartley Dunton

With Andrew’s untimely death at sea, Nancy managed the farm for another 10 years. When no longer able to manage, she apparently moved in with one of her and Andrew’s children. Her heirs decided that the land should be divided back to how it was when originally owned by Timothy and his son John. Timothy’s 70 acre portion went to Andrew and Nancy’s son Hartley. John’s 130 acre portion went to John Jr.’s son, Stephen.

Hartley – Born in 1817, Hartley and his wife Lucy Ann Hodgdon lived on the farm for a number of years until death when the property left the Dunton family. Little is known about his time there. However, he is buried in the small family cemetery on the property.

Stephen – Born on March 29, 1797, Stephen and his wife Elizabeth (Betsy) Parsons had 12 children. He inherited his grandfather, John Dunton’s 130 acres in 1839.

Table 3 – Stephen and Betsy Dunton’s Family

Manson	Born: Aug 8, 1818	Married: Martha McCarty
Stephen Jr.	Born: April 8, 1822	Killed by Fish hawk (6 May 1839)
Thomas	Born: Feb 5, 1824	Drowned at the Dyke (9 July, 1839)
Eliza Jane	Born: June 6, 1825	Married: William Welch
Olive W.	Born: April 14, 1827	Married: Benjamin Greenleaf
Charlotte	Born: Nov 8, 1828	Married: Dr. Cook
Emmeline	Born: Mar 29 1831	Married: Rufus Wright
James Franklin	Born: Sept 26, 1832	Married: Abbie Fowles
Merrill	Born: Sept 24, 1833	Married: Unknown
Harriet Ann	Born: Dec 11, 1835	Married: Stephen Judkins
Martha Abigail	Born: Mar 9, 1840	Married: Turner McCarty
Mary A.	Born: Jan 15, 1842	Married: Turner McCarty (2 nd wife)

Tragedy struck the family in 1839 when their son Stephen Jr. was killed by a “Fish hawk” (Osprey) on May 6th. Only two months later, another son, Thomas, was drowned at the “dyke” along the shore of Squam Creek. Stephen died in 1881. Many of the family members of Stephen and Betsy Dunton are buried in the Dunton cemetery on the preserve near the home site.

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

The Fifth Generation – Eliza Jane and James Franklin

Eliza Jane – In 1865 Stephen Dunton deeded a small “7-rod by 7-rod” site where the house originally built by John Dunton was located. It is likely that she and her husband, William Welch had been living there for a number of years and may have rebuilt the house on John Dunton’s cellar hole. The original house may have been acquired by James Jewett and moved across the island to Jewett Cove around 1850. See the photo of the house that was moved in Figure 6. Was this the house built by John Dunton around 1760? The size and shape are similar based on measurements of the foundations. A mystery yet to be solved.



Figure 6 - House Moved from "The Hill at Squam Creek" to Junction cove around 1850

Eliza Jane, and her husband William Welch raised their family there including a daughter, Adeline, born in 1851. Upon the death of her mother, Betsy in 1876, she returned to her father’s house to live and care for her father, Stephen, until his death in 1881.

James Franklin – A Mariner and fisherman, James Franklin, born in 1832 was given a small part of Stephen Dunton’s farm for his family. A house had been built on the 0.7-acre parcel likely by Manson Dunton, James Franklin’s older brother, around 1840. As Stephen was settling his affairs, he deeded the house and tiny parcel to James Franklin in January of 1876.

James Franklin Dunton	Born: Sept 26, 1832 Lost at sea; 1878	Married: Abbie Fowles
Abbie Fowles Dunton	Born: Jan 24, 1841 Died: Unknown	Married: James Franklin, Relocated to Boston soon after his death in 1878
Mattie Dunton	Born: 1861 Died: 1930	Married: John Conley, 1884
Lizzie Dunton	Born: 1863	Married: Sanford Montgomery, 1879
Richard Dunton	Born: 1865 Died: 1889	Unmarried
Kervin Riggs Dunton	Born: 1867 Died: 1958	Lived with Edmond Colby Family after father’s death in 1878, as a teenager, hiked to Boston to be with his mother and family. Married: Mabel Derby, 1907
Julia Dunton	Born: 1869 (est.) Died: Unknown	Adopted by James and Janette McLaughlin in 1878
Clara Dunton	Born: 1871 Died: 1961	Married: Unknown
Bertha Dunton	Born: 1873 Died: 1949	Married: Fred Warren Toothaker, 1893

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

James Franklin and Abbie had 7 children and he made his living at sea. As too often happened in those days, he was lost at sea. He died in 1878, leaving a family with no other means of support. Abbie struggled but was unable to remain. She placed one child, her son Kervin Dunton, with the Edmund Colby family. A daughter, Julia, was adopted by James and Janette McLaughlin on the island. Abbie took the rest of her family with her and returned to Massachusetts to be near her parents and siblings.

The house was abandoned, and all that remains is the well-crafted cellar hole.

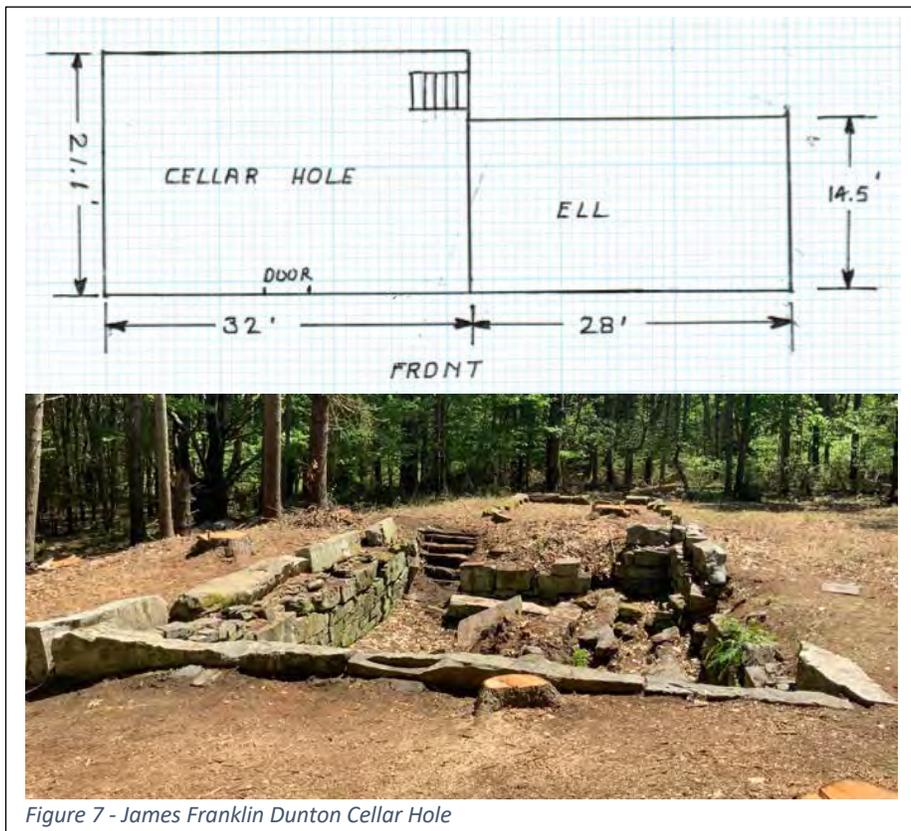


Figure 7 - James Franklin Dunton Cellar Hole

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

The Sixth Generation – Adeline and Kervin

Adeline – Addie, daughter of Eliza Jane and William Welch, was born in 1851 and raised on the old John Dunton home site. In 1872, she married Tom Colby. After losing Tom, she married Charles Ruckley in 1892. Mr. Ruckley operated hotels in Bath and saw the potential for a summer hotel at Squam Creek.

“Rusticators” had discovered the peace and quiet of rural coastal Maine towns like Westport Island.

He and Addie decided to take down her father Stephen Dunton’s old house and replace it with a stately guest hotel catering to summer visitors. Based on a date written on a wall board, the hotel was built in 1892. It is evident that some of the construction materials came from Stephen Dunton’s original house. The Ruckleys operated the hotel and farm until 1912.



Figure 8 – A Summer Hotel Called “Rialto Farm” Replaces Stephen Dunton’s Farm House in 1892

Kervin – Just a young boy of 11 when left with the Edmund Colby family, Kervin yearned to be with his family in Massachusetts. When he was old enough, he started his journey “home” to Woburn. He made it back to his family.

A hard worker, he got a job at Derby Desk Company building office furniture. He did well and worked his way up the organization and became superintendent.

When Mabel Derby’s father passed away, Kervin noted Mabel’s plight, and that of her children, and offered his hand in marriage. She accepted and, in so doing, Kervin assumed leadership of the company. In 1902 he partnered with one Mr. Doten and formed the Doten-Dunton Desk Company. The company employed about 400 workers.

One of the Doten-Dunton Desks was donated to the Westport Island History Committee and is now located in the History Center.



Figure 9 - Kervin Dunton's "Doten-Dunton Desk Company" Ad

Dunton Family Settlement at Squam Creek

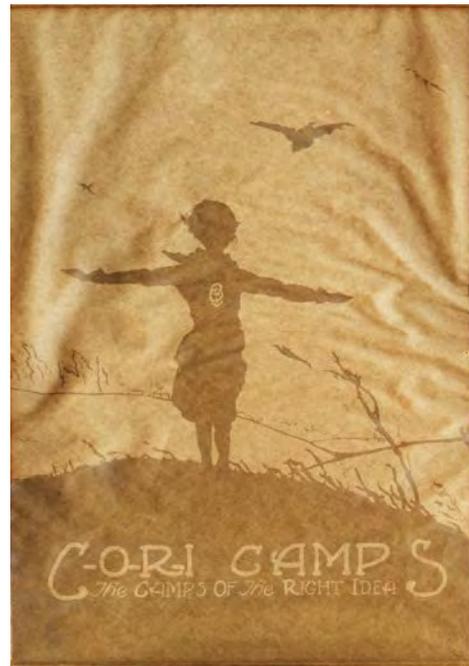
–Westport Island’s Earliest Permanent Settler Family?

After the Dunton’s Stewardship of the Land

Addie and Charles Ruckley sold “Rialto Farm” to Henrietta Powell, and her husband, who envisioned a girl’s summer camp. Henrietta added the “ell” which was shipped over the ice from Woolwich, to provide for more gathering space and an enlarged kitchen. She called her camp “CORI camp” (Camp Of the Right Idea).

CORI Camp operated for many years until the house reverted to a summer residence. In 1959 it was sold to Carl and Barbara Segerstrom who went about bringing back the adjoining Dunton land and Hodgdon land that formed John Dunton and Joseph Dunton’s original farms.

In 2017, the Kennebec Estuary Land Trust purchased the Squam Creek land from the Segerstroms as a public preserve protecting both the natural resources of Squam Creek and the historic settlement of some of the earliest settlers on Westport island for future generations.



In Closing

The history of the Dunton family settlement on Westport Island in an on-going story. As more information is uncovered, this summary will be updated and expanded. We remain uncertain if Timothy and Elizabeth Dunton were the first permanent settlers of “Jeremysquam” in c.1740, but there is a good likelihood that they may have been. In any event, the history of the Dunton family settlement tells a story that is emblematic of all our early settler families on Westport Island.