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A History of Sanbornton NH Volume I  
By Moses T Runnels

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## WILD ANIMALS IN SANBORNTON.

“Ἐνταῦθα . . . ἦν καὶ παράδεισος μέγας ἀγρίων θηρίων πλήρης.”

In this place was also a great park full of wild animals. — XENOPHON.

THE pertinence of this quotation is proved by another from the

former annalist of Sanbornton: “In the early part of the settlement of the town, deer and wolves were plenty here”; or, according to another statement, “Wild beasts, [in 1770] were numerous and troublesome.” Hence the settlers, as soon as they felt able,

Numerous in early times.

“Voted, To give ten dollars bounty for a grown wolf’s head, and five dollars for a wolf’s whelp, for all that shall be killed in this town.”

These bounties were offered by the town for several years after the

close of the Revolutionary war, “for the purpose of encouraging the destruction of the wolves, while the ‘deer keepers’ were intended to prevent the destruction of that useful animal.”

Bounties on wolves.

It is related that Thomas Eastman (north of Steele’s Hill) “had put up the frame of his barn, but had not covered it, when on one occasion in the fall, he found it necessary to continue husking corn all night, with incessant shouting, to keep the wolves away from his stock.” We have also this published statement, 1871 (Cong. Church Centennial, page 34): —

Corn-husking all night.

“There is a man still with us [Capt. John B. Perkins] who has lived eighty-seven years in Sanbornton from his birth, and who well remembers how he and his brother Chase used to dread to go only a little distance from the house to fetch the sheep home at evening, and how the night was made hideous by the howling of the wolves, congregated in packs near the spot where the bark mill and tan-pits afterwards were.”

Childhood’s fears recalled.

This must have been as late as 1790. Yet the work of destruction, encouraged by the bounties as above, soon proved effectual, and it was not many years after that the “last wolf in town” made his

appearance, as claimed by the venerable Peter Burleigh, who was then just old enough to crawl in under his father's barn, and drag out the nine of their flock which had been despatched; to say nothing of the *seven* other sheep which had just been killed by the same animal for Joseph Smith on the lot north of Mr. Burleigh's. The wolf had merely sucked the blood from the neck of each, and making his escape, was tracked through the woods east for half a mile, and was soon after caught on Hopkinson Hill in a trap set for foxes by Moses Emery, and by him killed. A bounty of thirty dollars was awarded Mr. Emery by the State for that operation.

The last wolf  
in town.

Adventures with *bears* were still more frequent among the earlier inhabitants of the town. As they were prized for their meat, it was considered quite an object to capture them. The most heroic achievement with Bruin is that accorded to Mrs. Abijah Sanborn, on what has since been the Colby and Col. D. Sanborn place, and probably as early as 1772. One evening she heard a strange noise near their house in the absence of her husband, and going out with a little dog, found a bear and two cubs prowling about their cornfield. The animals betook themselves to a large tree, or couple of trees, near by; at least the old bear and one of the cubs. She immediately built fires around the trees, patiently watched the intruders till morning, and then gave the customary shout of alarm, which the settlers had agreed upon to indicate danger. This soon brought Master Abraham Perkins to the scene of action with his gun. He shot the old bear and one cub; and cutting down a tree, his dog and himself soon despatched the third. "Few of our matrons at the present day," says the annalist of '41, "can boast of a feat like this; and fewer still of our maidens can say that they have ever treed a *bear*."

Adventures  
with bears.

Mrs. Sanborn's  
exploit.

Mr. Winthrop Durgin, in the early settlement of the Durgin lot, above Tin Corner, is said to have set three gun traps for these animals. He heard one of them "go off" (which mortally wounded or killed a bear), and then ran to secure his game, without thinking of the other traps, over one of which he passed safely; but in crossing the second he was himself severely shot in the thigh, rendering amputation necessary, and a painful journey to Concord for that purpose, before proceeding on his way to Epping, his former home. (See Vol. II. p. 233 [37].)

A disastrous  
bear trap.

Mr. Nathaniel Burley killed a bear near what is now Jeremiah B. Calef's residence; and the rock is still shown (though smaller than formerly), near the late Peter Burleigh's, where the carcass was hung up for dressing, proving very

Acceptable  
provision.

acceptable for meat just then. In the same neighborhood was living the notorious "Bear" Folsom, who is supposed to have had this sobriquet prefixed to his name, more frequently than his real name John, on account of the number of bears that he had doubtless succeeded in capturing. Among the other numerous bear catchers of Sanbornton, the names of Esquire Harper and Mr. Wadleigh have come down to us; the former taking his game in a trap, east of his premises, on the old meeting-house hill. On the Billy Smith place (mountain east of Taylor C. Prescott's), the family used to look out of their window at night and see the bears gnawing their wash-tubs.

There are two versions of the "bear-pig story" related of Mr. Buzzell, one of the earliest residents in the northwest corner of the town, near the present Isaac N. Lane place. One is that a bear attacked his pig, which ran for the house and in at the door ajar; that Bruin had seized or was about to seize his prey, when the door was shut in his face and he beat a retreat, the pig being safe within. The other account—less happy for the pig—represents the bear as attacking the entry of the cabin in which the pig was stored, and to have secured, or rather carried him captive, in spite of Mr. Buzzell's efforts to the contrary.

Yet more remarkable is the well-authenticated legend respecting the oxen of Mr. Hill, who lived back of the present Andrew Taylor's (Hill Pasture), prior to 1779. The story is that at one time these oxen heard the loud bellowing of a cow that was being worried by a bear on the north side of Salmon Brook (Weeks or Dustin lot), more than a mile distant, when they instinctively rushed at full speed to the scene of distress, and either drove away, or according to one account, killed the bear.

One Mr. C——, an old hunter from Boscawen, used to come up to catch bears in this town. He is said on one occasion, when he had gone into a den for the capture of some cubs, to have experienced the not enjoyable sensation of the darkening of the cave's mouth by the return of the mother bear, which resulted in a desperate hand-to-hand encounter, and victory to the hunter's knife. But whether that occurrence was on Sanbornton soil is uncertain. It is certain, however, that Ebenezer Sanborn did not secure the bear which he "brought down" from the stub of a tree just south of the present Samuel Hersey place, Sanborn Road; and it is probable that the *last* bear in Sanbornton, which so frightened A. Dalton as he was returning home of an evening to the Plains from the Square, was soon after shot in the west part of the town.

"Bear"  
Folsom.

Other remi-  
niscences.

The "bear-  
pig story."

Chivalrous  
oxen.

Close  
encounter.

Last bear in  
Sanbornton.

In 1835, Mrs. Josiah Philbrook saw a deer in the pasture, and was alarmed at the strangeness of the sight, supposing it to be "some beast of prey"; and as late as 1845, Peter Cate drove a deer into the bay from the Gilford side, which was killed in the water by Joseph Johnson, when it had nearly reached our shore. Finally, the killing of the last moose in Sanbornton was thus described by Mr. Peter Burleigh, as occurring some sixty or seventy years ago:—

"The Blakes, well-known hunters of New Hampton, had driven him out of the mountain with their dogs, and had pursued him as far as Nicholas Giles's, east of Cawley Pond. Here the hunters passed the night, and the dogs 'lay by,' that is, kept guard over the moose in the neighboring swamp. The next morning the chase was resumed in a southwest direction, passing the site which the first Baptist meeting-house has since occupied. Near this spot, Jona. Cass, on going to mill, was greatly frightened at the sight of an animal hurrying by 'with so much rigging on his head.' The moose finally came to bay at a tree, the roots of which were lately to be seen near Frederick Osgood's, and backed up against it for self-defence. He broke the thigh of one of the dogs, so that it had to be killed, but was at last shot by David Dustin, several men from the north part of the town having joined the hunters. The Messrs. Blake gave the meat to Mr. Dustin for shooting, and themselves bore back the hide and antlers to New Hampton, as their trophies from the chase."

Later appearances of deer.

The last moose captured in town.