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Bristol, Addison County, Vermont Genealogy

THE town of Bristol lies largely upon the mountains, in the northeastern section of the county, and is bounded on the north by Monkton and Starksboro; east by Starksboro and Lincoln; south by Lincoln and Middlebury, and west by New Haven. It was originally granted by Benning Wentworth, the colonial governor of New Hampshire under King George III, "by his Excellency's command with advice of council," June 26, 1762, to Samuel Averill and sixty-two associates, under the name of Pocock. This name, given in honor of a distinguished English admiral, was retained only a few years, however, and was changed to Bristol by an act of the Legislature passed October 21, 1789. The charter deed contained the usual restrictions incident to the Wentworth grants, and the usual reservation of public lands for the use of schools, propagation of the gospel, etc., and fixed the boundary lines of the new town as follows:

"Beginning at the northeasterly corner of New Haven and thence extending south six miles by New Haven aforesaid to the southeasterly corner thereof; thence turning off and running east four miles and one-half to a marked tree; thence turning off and running north eight miles and a half to another marked tree; thence turning off and running west four miles to the easterly side line of Monkton; thence south by Monkton about half a mile, to an angle thereof; thence west by Monkton aforesaid about two miles to another angle thereof; thence south by Monkton aforesaid four hundred and twenty rods to the northerly side line of New Haven; and thence south seventy degrees east one mile and one hundred and ninety rods by New Haven to the northeasterly corner thereof, the bounds began at."

This gave the town something more than the area of a full township, or 23,600 acres; but this area was curtailed by the Legislature November 18, 1824, when a portion of land described as follows was set off to the town of Lincoln, viz.:







"Beginning at the southeast corner of the town of Bristol and thence running west one mile to the west line of the second tier of lots; thence north on the west line of said lots six miles and eighty rods, to the north line of lots numbered twenty-two and twenty-three; thence east to Starksboro line; thence south to the northwest corner of Lincoln; and thence south on Lincoln west line to the place of beginning." This gave to Lincoln a tract of 4,400 acres, leaving the area of Bristol only 19,200 acres, as it exists to-day.

The surface of this territory, as a whole, may be regarded as extremely

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rough and broken, if not decidedly mountainous, though there are many level tracts. Through nearly the whole length of the town from north to south, there extends a spur of the Green Mountain range. From the north line of the town south to Bristol village, a distance of about four miles, this spur has an elevation of 3,648 feet, unbroken by gorge or stream--crossed not even by a highway. From its peculiar formation it takes the name of Hogback Mountain. Near the village, however, it is broken by "The Notch," through which flows New Haven River. South of the Notch, which is wide enough to admit not only of the passage of the river, but a good carriage road and some intervalle land, the elevation takes the name of South Mountain.

South Mountain continues lofty and unbroken until we reach the "Little Notch," through which flows O'Brian Brook; south of this it is unbroken until it crosses the southern line of the town. The larger part of these mountains is clothed with vegetation and timber to their summits; but upon South Mountain there is an area of several acres which appears from a distance to be a large smooth rock. A closer inspection, however, resolves it into an area of broken rocks, piled promiscuously together. It bears the name of "Rattlesnake Den," from the fact that in early days it was the favorite lurking-place of hordes of these reptiles. About two-thirds of the tillable lands of the town lie west of these mountains. Following the course of New Haven River there is a wide tract of level alluvial land, called British Flats, northwest of which the land is moderately level, rising from gentle swells to hills of quite extensive proportions in the extreme northwestern part of the town. On the north line of the town, extending south on both sides of the mountains, there is a cedar swamp several hundred acres in extent. East of the mountain the land is more broken, a large part being unfit for purposes of cultivation. The soil of the tillable tracts, though generally very productive, varies largely in different parts of the town. Bristol Flats, rising little above the level of the river, consists of a fine, deep, fertile alluvial deposit, which was originally covered with a heavy growth of timber, interspersed with a vigorous growth of nettles. On the more elevated plains a harder, compact, gravelly soil is found, but not so much diminished in richness and fertility as one would naturally suppose, and made up largely of loam and clay. Some portions of the still higher elevations are very stony; others are free from these obstructions. The uplands and intervalles are capable of producing good crops of Indian corn, rye, oats, peas, beans, buckwheat, flax and potatoes. Formerly much winter wheat was raised. Garden vegetables flourish well, and small fruits are grown successfully. The land was originally covered with a dense growth of timber notable for its numerous varieties, among which were the following: White, Norway, and pitch pine; sugar, soft, and striped maple; white, red, and black ash; white, blue, and red white, black, and red oak; large white, small white, black, and yellow buttonwood, elm, slippery elm, butternut, hemlock, balsam, fir, tamarack; double and single spruce; basswood, ironwood, mountain ash, red cedar; red, black and choke cherry; black alder, witch hazel, prickly ash, poplar, willow, hickory, and others, many of which varieties are still found in the towns.

The principal stream is New Haven River. It has its source in Ripton and that part of Lincoln formerly known as Avery's Gore, and after flowing a northerly course through a part of Lincoln, receiving the waters of several

small tributaries, it enters Bristol from the east, passing through the deep ravine known as "The Notch," thence on to a point just west of Bristol village, when it turns abruptly to the south, continuing that course to a point just east of New Haven Mills, where it turns abruptly west again, flowing into New Haven. It affords many good and usually reliable water powers. The stream, however, is subject to frequent and heavy freshets; in 1830 one of these caused great loss of life and property, as will be noted in connection with the history of the town of New Haven.

Baldwin Creek, having its source in Washington county, flows through the southern part of Starksboro into Bristol, and thence by a circuitous route winds its way to New Haven River, which it enters about a mile and a quarter above Bristol Village. Immediately after crossing into Bristol it enters a deep ravine, known as Chase Hollow, which it follows to its debouchure. It is a small stream, though it affords considerable motive power for mills. Many years since there were two forges in operation on this stream.

O'Brian Brook, so named in honor of the O'Brians, who built the first grist mill in Bristol on this stream, has its source in a small pond in the western part of the town, flows south and west through "Little Notch," uniting with New Haven River about where that stream turns west into New Haven. This is a smaller stream than Baldwin Creek, and is not so valuable for the water power it affords, although at one time it turned the wheels of four saw-mills.

Beaver Brook is a small stream flowing along the eastern base of Hogback Mountain, entering Baldwin Brook. There are several other small and unimportant brooks, and springs are abundant.

Bristol Pond, about a mile and a half in length and three-quarters of a mile in width, lies in the northern part of the town, at the western base of Hogback Mountain, extending upon Monkton line. It is shallow and muddy and partially surrounded by extensive marshes. The only other pond is that which we have spoken of as the source of O'Brian Brook, in the eastern part of the town. It covers an area of only about ten acres.

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