



Vinalhaven April 5th 1821,
William D. Williamson Esq^r

Dear Sir

I received yours of the 24th of January when in Portland attending the Legislature: but the length of the Session did not admit of my return home until the last of March. The shortness of time would not admit of my going into so lengthy A detail of occurranies as I should have wished.

pretty correct

But I herewith send you A short though I believe ^ Statement of the most important transactions that have taken place since the first settlement of the Town up to the present time.

If this should prove useful either to you or the public the wishes
be

of your friends and humble ~~humble~~ servant would ^ gratified

Thomas Waterman

Contributed to Maine Memory Network by Maine Historical Society

(Coll. 62)

Date: 1821

Description: Letter concerning Vinalhaven's history

The Town of Vinalhaven was Incorporated in the year 1789. It derived its name from John Vinall^{Esq} of Boston, who was employed as an Agent by the settlers in the year 1786, to obtain A Grant of their Lands from the Government of Massachusetts. This name however was obtained without the knowledge, or consent of the Inhabitants. The original name was Fox=Islands, so called for its abound- ing in Foxes particularly the Silver=grey Fox, which are seldom found in other parts of this State. It was first settled in the Year 1766. Bounda- ries as follows, Viz. Westerly, and Northerly, by Penobscot Bay. Easterly by Fox=Island Bay, which separates these Islands from the Isle of Holt, and Deer=Isle. And Southerly, by the Atlantic Ocean. Said Islands Contain 16527 Acres; including all the small Islands lying within three Miles. There are two large Islands, known by the name of the North, and South, Fox=Islands; separated by A large Thorough=fare, at an average of about one Mile wide; which affords A good Ship Channel for Vessels, and an excellent Harbor. In the Year 1779, the British took possession of Major = Bigwaduce (so called) and soon after erected A Fort on the peninsula. about this time, the inhabitants on these Islands, being in A defenseless situation, were compelled to leave their families, and to work on this Fort. They were likewise required, to take the oath of Allegiance. This became too intolerable A burthen for them to bear. About this time, many of the Settlers moved off these Islands, into other parts of Maine and Massachusetts, leaving their property behind: which became A prey to the invaders, their Houses, and Barns were burnt by the enemy, their Cattle, and Sheep destroyed, and nothing was left, but the Soil. This however did not discourage them. After peace was declared, they again moved back, and enjoyed their rights, and privileges, under A free and independent government, and soon became A respectable Plantation. In the Year 1786, there were 72 Settlers on these Islands; who petitioned the Legislature of Massachusetts, for A Grant of their Lands; which they obtained on the following conditions, Viz. by appropriating 200 Acres of good Land for the use of the Ministry; and 200 Acres for the use of A Grammar School. And to pay into the State Treasury, within one Year with Interest, the Sum of 180 Pounds in Specie; and also the Sum of 66 Pounds.

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In Consolidated Securities. Which was complied with by the petitioners
 [Islands:] Matinicus is A Fertile Island, lying South from the Fox-Islands,
 distant about 15 Miles; and contains 103 Inhabitants. A Mr. Hall,
 the first settler on this Island, was barbarously killed by the Indians,
 and his Wife, and Children, taken Captive by them and carried off.]
 Butter, and Eagle Islands, are two fertile Islands, lying between Vinal-
 haven and Brookville; distant about 4 Miles; owned by William Gray Esq.
 of Boston: Containing 19 Inhabitants. Great & Little, Spruce Head, and
 Beech Islands, lie between Vinalhaven and Brookville, containing 27
 Inhabitants, owned by individuals. There are likewise, A great number
 of small Islands, in this vicinity too numerous to mention particularly.
 The shape of this Town may be seen, by applying to the Map of Maine.
 Ponds: In the middle of the North Island, there is A fresh Pond, contain-
 ing about 100 Acres. On the South Island there are two large Ponds,
 and several small ones. Improved lands in the Town 2860 Acres; unimprov-
 ed, unimprovable, and Wood Lands, 13667 Acres. Value of Lands: Wood
 Lands on the North Island have been sold for 12 Dollars per Acre,
 for the 100 Acres; improved lands about the same price; but of late,
 the price of Land here has been very ^{much} reduced. Records: Plantation
 Records commence, March 11th 1785. Town Records 1789. Soil & produce:
 the Soil on the North Island, is of A dark reddish color rather inclin-
 ing to gravel, and produces Corn, Wheat, Rye, Barley and Oats, and
 Vegetables in abundance: Butter, Cheese, Beef, Pork and Mutton, are raised
 here for the market, of A superior quality. Two Oxen have been killed
 here one weighing 1325 Pounds, having 150 Pounds of rough Tallow; the
 other weighing 1303 Pounds having 175 Pounds of Tallow. A large proportion
 of the South Island is Mountainous and barren, but nature has in part compensated
 for this by reason of fine Harbors: the great number of Fish ^{privileges}.
 The Herring Fishery is carried on here ^{to} great advantage. The growth of this
 Island being principally Spruce, affords plenty of Spars which are often
 Shipped to the Southern States for A market.
 Wealth: There are 4 Stores in the Town. Ten Vessels of 50 Tons and upwards.
 And A large number of small Fishing Vessels, 5 Tons and upwards.
 There are 3 Saw Mills, and 2 Grist Mills, all on tide waters. Machines
 none. Factories none. Bridges and Orchards none worth mentioning.
 Paupers supported by the Town, in 1819 - 25 In 1820 - 16
 Bushels of Wheat raised in A year 1100

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Religion. Incorporated parishes none. Meetinghouses one on the North Island. Settled Ministers none: but a great variety of traveling preachers of different denominations. Professors of Religion of the Baptist order 121: Of the Methodist order 80. Of the Congregational order 5. Ministers on the North Island, Reverend Samuel Macomber of the Baptist order, supported by subscription. Minister on the South Island Reverend John Lewis of the Methodist order, & Circuit preacher. Literature: There are Eight School Districts in this Town. Number of Schollars from 4 to 16 Years of age, about 450. Money Annually raised for the support of Schools 400 Dollars. Public Libraries none: men of Collegiate education one; Mr Willard Glover; employment, in the winter teaching School, in the Summer season study
Physicians, one. Newspapers taken, Six. Political: Voters, 240. Rat^eable Polls, 270. This Town was first represented in the General Court in the Year 1801. First Representative, William Vinall Esq^r, who represented this town for several years in the Legislature of Massachusetts. Cyril Brown Esq^r was the next Representative: these were the only Representatives ^{chosen} while under the Government of Massachusetts. Delegate to the Convention at Brunswick, Cap^t Thomas Beverage. Delegate to the Convention at Portland, M^r Benjamin Beverage. First Representative in the Legislature of Maine, Thomas Waterman. First plantation Clerk Cap^t Joseph Waterman: second plantation Clerk, Cap^t Thomas Beverage, who was chosen Town Clerk after it was Incorporated. Post-office none in the town. Character: The Inhabitants of this Town are noted for their humanity and benevolence particularly to strangers. Employment: the Inhabitants of the North Island, are principally employed in cultivating the soil which affords them a comfortable support, for themselves and families. The Inhabitants of the South Island are principally employed in the Fishery, for their support. In the Year 1812 war was declared by the United States against Great Britain and her dependencies. took possession On the first day of September 1814 the British Fleet ^{of} Castine and all the territory to the Eastward of Penobscot River soon after. In the month of November following Commissions were sent to Cyril Select men of the Town Brown Thomas Waterman and David Woster ^{select men of the town} by General Gosselin Commander in Chief at Castine. Authorising them to administer the Oath of Allegiance or neutrality to the male Inhabitants of the

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Town of Vinalhaven. This however they refused to do, and returned the Commissions to the General, stating their objections, which was referred to Sir John Sherbrook, Governor of Nova Scotia, for his consideration. But nothing further took place respecting the Oath required. In the year 1813 the Privateer Schooner Lily, having Captured 3 Coasting Vessels, belonging to this State, and Convoing them to Halifax, having head winds, went into a small harbor in this vicinity, formed by several small Islands, they were however discovered, by some of our fishermen; and a small party of our Militia, collected, and fired upon the Privateer, killed the Capt. and drove the crew below. They however, succeeded in cutting their Cable, and drifted out of the harbor, & made their escape leaving the other Vessels behind ^{which} were retaken, and delivered to the former owners. Mr. Nathaniel Crocket the first settler on these Islands in the year 1766 was a stout robust man who endured hardship & fatigue with courage, and fortitude, and encouraged other settlers who afterwards settled on said ~~said~~ Islands.

Mr. Thomas Brown one of the old settlers, has had 21 Children he is now living and in good health.

Mr. Isaac Airy one of the first settlers, as he was returning home out of the woods, with his Axe one evening, in a narrow foot path, met a large Bear, who refused to turn out of the path, he marched up in close quarters; the Bear then reared up on his hind feet to receive him, he then aimed at him, with such force, and exactness that he split open the head of the Bear, & dispatched him immediately.

Mr. John Perry, who lived here in the American Revolution having harvested his Corn and hid it in a Crib in the woods, finding part of the crew of a Man of war, robbing the crib, fired on them and killed two men dead in the spot. He was afterwards severely persecuted by the British Cruisers, and several times narrowly escaped their hands.

In many places on the Banks of these Islands are found large beds of Clamshells, three or four feet deep supposed to be carried up by the ancient Indians: over which in many places there was a large growth of Trees. These are the only remains now to be seen of the ancient Indians.

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