

Thomas Dexter

I was born in 1595 and grew up to be a well-educated and successful businessman in England. A group of us were offered large land grants if we would travel to the new Massachusetts Bay Colony and begin building the infrastructure that was needed to make the settlements viable. I left England in 1630 with 2 of my sons, Thomas and William, and my daughter, Mary, along with several servants.

I initially settled in the Saugus/Lynn area and was instrumental in financing and building the first Ironworks in the country in Saugus. I also built several mills and other businesses that were needed by the new settlers.

In 1637 nine other men and I, and our families, were asked to take our skills and talents and travel to an area south of Plymouth to start a new settlement. Mills were critical to the success of any community, particularly Sandwich, as the nearest mill of any kind was a day's travel by ox cart to Plymouth. The meal from my mills formed the basis of the food supply for many years in both the Boston area and Sandwich.

The first mill in Sandwich was erected almost immediately in 1637 and was followed by 3 more improved versions until the mill you see on Shawme Pond today was built in 1654. That mill was restored in 1961 and is still operating.

It remains one of the oldest continuously operating business sites in the country.

During my stay in Lynn/Saugus I had dealings with local Chief, Pognanum, better known as "Black Will." My purchase of Nahant from Black Will for a suit of clothes is still immortalized on the Nahant coat of arms. A long court case ensued in which I, and later my descendants sued to take possession of Nahant. It was finally decided against our family in 1687. One of the factors was that Black Will had apparently sold Nahant to more than one buyer.

My title of "Gentleman" was revoked temporarily because I was outspoken in his dislike of the King and the way England was ruling the new colony. In that, I was about 130 years ahead of my time.

I returned to Boston in 1675 to live with my daughter, Mary, and her second husband, Capt. James Oliver.

I left this world in 1677, and my remains are buried in the Oliver tomb in King's Chapel Burying Ground.