

# History of Waverley

The village of Waverley developed during the 1860s when gold was discovered near the Indian water route between Lakes William and Thomas. Before that time the land in this area had been settled by Europeans.

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## Early History of Waverley

In 1749 Halifax, Nova Scotia, was founded by the British government to establish a fortress and naval base in Nova Scotia designed to be stronger than the French fortress of Louisbourg. After this, the British started to colonize Nova Scotia by offering grants of land to Protestant settlers in a deliberate attempt to overbalance the original French Catholic population.

One of the earliest land grants was to Joseph Scott, who was a prominent citizen in the new settlement of Halifax. In 1759, only ten years after the founding of Halifax, he was granted land near Sackville, Nova Scotia. He built sawmills at Bedford on his first land grant. Six years later, in 1765, he was granted a further 7000 acres of land to supply his mills. This grant included part of the land on which Waverley now stands.

In 1776 about 1700 acres of land in the Waverley area were granted to a group of Non-Commissioned Officers and Sailors. This grant was situated between Third Lake and Lake Thomas (See [Maps of Area at the end of this document](#)). It is not known whether all of the men who were granted land actually settled on the land but some probably did.

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## Charles Pillsbury Allen and Industry

About thirty years before gold was discovered in Waverley there was a small industry of furniture making in this area. Charles P. Allen, a Halifax furniture dealer, set up a lathe at Fall River for manufacturing chair legs. The lathe was driven by a water wheel situated on the falls below Miller Lake. At first, the factory produced only chairs, and Allen was able to sell these at a lower price than chairs imported to Halifax from Boston. Later, he manufactured other types of furniture including settees and benches, and also had a bucket factory.

In 1847, Allen bought 700 acres of land at the present site of Waverley for fifty pounds. He made his home on this land near where Lakes Thomas and William meet. Charles P. Allen named his property "Waverley" after his favorite author's works (Sir Walter Scott's "Waverley Novels"). Mr. and Mrs. Allen had ten children whose names are recorded in the family bible. One of their daughters, Ellen, married Cornelius Blois, who had, as a young boy, worked with C.P. Allen and had lived with the Allen family in Waverley.

Cornelius Blois was one of the discoverers of gold in Waverley. When he married Ellen Allen in 1866,

he was the Lieutenant in command of the militia at Waverley.

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## "GOLD!"

We can perhaps imagine this area in 1860, the few residents quietly working to make their living. The Skerry family farming their land, the Allen family, with their apprentices, making chairs and transporting them by horse and wagon to Halifax. Soon the peace was to be shattered by the cry "GOLD AT WAVERLEY"!

There is some controversy as to the first actual discoverer of the gold but it is recorded that three men, Cornelius Blois, Henry Taylor and James Skerry made their findings known at about the same time. During August and September of 1861, Cornelius Blois, digging behind the home where his descendants still reside, made a find but did not file a claim. It was on the nearby Charles P. Allen's property that Henry Taylor made his discovery and first brought the find to public notice on August 23rd, 1861. This area we know today as Muddy Pond and American Hill ([See Maps of Area at the end of this document](#)).

We can, perhaps, imagine the excitement when the cry of "GOLD AT WAVERLEY" reached Halifax, and so it is not unusual that such important personages as The Honorable Joseph Howe drove to Waverley, examined the area, and returned to Halifax with some nuggets. After Mr. Howe made a statement upon his return to Halifax, hundreds rushed to the grounds.

The "Chebucto Mining Association", made up of a group of Halifax merchants, attempted to make a thorough and systematic prospect of the area. They had obtained exclusive rights of search for six months, until May 1st, 1862, from Mr. Taylor. They were not successful in their venture but the day following cessation of their lease, Mr. Taylor exposed a large gold bearing vein.



As we have mentioned, a third man was James Skerry, who made his find on Laidlaw's Hill ([See Maps of Area at the end of this document](#)), in the eastern division of Waverley on September 14th, 1861. Also, around this time, the mines were gaining worldwide notice and soon mining companies from all over the world would settle here to try and make their fortunes.

In 1864 the principal companies engaged in active mining were the Waverley and Boston Co., the North American Co., Rockland and Lake Major Co. (Thomas L. DeWolf), and the Chebucto Mining Co.

Hardrock miners from Germany and Cornwall, England had been brought in and these, along with other ambitious gold seekers, mixed with the few permanent residents. In many instances shacks were hastily constructed but many came with families and built more permanent structures. Some are still in evidence today, suggesting that the early belief in Waverley's future was sincere.

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# Shubenacadie Canal: Information and History

Used by the mi'kmaq for centuries, the Shubenacadie waterway was carved out of bedrock by glaciers during the last ice age.

Work on the canal system began in 1826, ceased in 1831 and resumed in 1854. The canal was completed in 1861. Construction of 9 locks and 2 inclined planes connected a chain of 7 lakes and the Shubenacadie River, enabling boats to travel from Halifax Harbour to the Minas Basin. The only other route to the Bay of Fundy was by way of Cape Sable, a dangerous sail.

The Shubenacadie Canal opened in sections and operated between 1856 and 1870. Steam vessels hauled barges laden with goods along the system.



By 1870, railways were able to transport goods faster and more cheaply than ships, forcing the closure of the canal.

Waverley had two points of particular interest on the Shubenacadie Canal System. The first was an inclined plane at the head of Lake William. This inclined plane was used in conjunction with a trolley system to move boats between Lakes Charles and Lake William. The second was a drawbridge at the other end of Lake William, between Lakes William and Thomas.

The drawbridge over the Old Scott's Road, now Rocky Lake Drive, lifted to allow canal traffic to pass.

The Shubenacadie Canal was an important transportation link for gold mining in Waverley. The canal moved goods needed for gold mining to

Waverley: machinery and coal from Dartmouth, lumber, bricks and granite from the Grand Lake area.

In the 1800s, Lakes William and Thomas had the same water level, unlike today.

The Shubenacadie Canal System is now a National Historic Civil Engineering site and a popular recreation and heritage corridor. The canal offers a wonderful wilderness experience for hikers and canoeists alike.

For more information on the Shubenacadie Canal, please contact the Fairbanks Center:

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# Aerial photo with contour lines (1972)



## Topographical Map (1950)



## Topographical Map (1962)

