The settlement of the Eastern Townships
Nicholas Austin and the Leader and Associate System

Adaptation of a presentation by Dr. Jim Manion, Champlain College of Vermont. Austin, October 1st 2011

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Nicholas Austin and the Leader and Associate System

Nicholas Austin of New England
Manson, J. W., 2001,

Rapport préliminaire pour le Comité culturel d'Austin.

Main sources
Knowlton.

Township of Bolton, Brome County Historical Society,
Shufelt H.B., 1971,

Nicholas Austin I
Austin families

Nicholas Austin I (1736-1821) (died at 85 years) married to Phoebe Chedley (1735-1814)

Nicholas Austin II (1768-1853) (died at 85 years) married to Rebecca Austin (1778-1858)

Nicholas Austin III (1782-1867) (died at 85 years) married to Lovina Austin (1793-1871)

Nicholas Austin IV (1819-1899) (died at 80 years) married to Rebecca Austin (1821-1904)

Nicholas Austin V (1813-1859) (died at 46 years) married to Sally Austin (1819-1899)

Nicholas Austin VI (1821-1904) (died at 83 years) married to Anna Austin (1827-1913)

Nicholas Austin VII (1832-1899) (died at 67 years) married to Mark Austin (1837-1904)

Nicholas Austin VIII (1837-1904) (died at 67 years) married to Mary Austin (1843-1925)

Nicholas Austin IX (1843-1925) (died at 82 years) married to Ann Austin (1849-1945)

Nicholas Austin X (1849-1945) (died at 96 years) married to Esther Austin (1855-1951)

Nicholas Austin XI (1855-1951) (died at 96 years) married to Mary Austin (1861-1945)

Nicholas Austin XII (1861-1945) (died at 84 years) married to Ann Austin (1867-1951)

Nicholas Austin XIII (1867-1951) (died at 84 years) married to Mary Austin (1873-1961)

Nicholas Austin XIV (1873-1961) (died at 88 years) married to Ann Austin (1879-1981)

Nicholas Austin XV (1879-1981) (died at 102 years) married to Mary Austin (1885-1991)

Nicholas Austin XVI (1885-1991) (died at 106 years) married to Ann Austin (1891-1997)

Appendix

List of the Leader and those of his Associates (Quakers and Protestants) who have appeared before the Land Committee and Subscribed the Declaration for the Township of Bolton Massachusetts 1st day of April 1796. (Studeb., 1971)

1. Nicholas Austin, Leader 20 - William Strickling
2. Silas Page 20 - Ezra Freeman
3. Joel Page 30 - John Bell
4. Joel Page 30 - Caleb Gray
5. Joshua Page 30 - David Gray
6. Peter Page 30 - Joseph Bell
7. Simon Dimond 35 - John Gray
8. Alexander Dimond 35 - William Gray
9. Charles Jarvis 37 - Jonas Hunt
10. James Taylor 30 - George Homer
11. Jonathan Page 30 - David Bell Junior
14. Jonathan Page 30 - David Bell
15. John Eastman 62 - Peter Yates
16. Joseph Clever 65 - Robert Manson
17. Samuel Page 65 - William Manson
20. Anderson Clew 67 - Simon Seaman
21. John Moore 68 - Peter Bowser
22. Samuel Austin 70 - Samuel Lord
23. Nicholas Austin Junior 70 - Richard Adams
24. William Page 70 - Benjamin Page
25. Daniel Austin 72 - Peter Weeks
26. Jacob Bowser 75 - David Bell
27. Christopher Underwood 75 - Thomas Shepherd Junior

Main sources

Duckworth, M., Nicholas Austin: Quaker Pioneer; www.wirpleims.com, consulted July 2012


Introduction
Nicholas Austin, a Quaker from New Hampshire, seemed an unlikely candidate for aristocracy in the 1790s wilderness of what came to be called the Eastern Townships. Yet the scheme under which he settled Bolton township was formulated by the British government precisely to create a new social order, including a landed aristocracy, that would counteract the rising power of the English-speaking merchant class along the border between the United States and Quebec. Known as the Leader and Associate system, the scheme was conceived by the British government to ensure that large landowners would hold control of the Legislative and Executive Councils.

Impact of the American Revolution
The American Revolution, which pitted colonial Americans against the British Crown, had a devastating effect on life in the colonies. Not all colonials were wholeheartedly in favor of the Revolution, and many people had to choose which side to fight on, which in effect divided families and friends. Those who stayed loyal to the British Crown, the Loyalists, were seen as traitors and sometimes were persecuted and their properties were seized. When the Patriots won, these Loyalists found themselves barred from putting down roots in this area, a terrible blow to them as many had started to clear land and build farms. And so, in 1784, the British forcibly moved many of these Loyalist families to Caraquai (Baiecomeau) and the Gaspé peninsula. Nonetheless some 75 people defiantly refused to leave, even though their provisions were cut off.

After General Burgoyne was defeated at Saratoga, many Loyalist moved north into Canada, which was under British rule. Some moved to the rich fertile farmland around Mississquoi Bay, at the end of Lake Champlain. They were promised land in the St. Armand Seignory, of which two thirds lay, unbeknownst to them, in what was to become the United States of America when the border issue came to be settled. As there were no natural physical features such as rivers or mountain ranges to delineate the border, rumor had it that the border between the new United States and the British territory was to be the 49th parallel. However no one knew where the 49th parallel ran! This was to cause many problems for the new settlers.

Unfortunately, the Loyalists did not receive the support they expected from the British government. Governor Haldimand, in Quebec, did not want the border area to be settled by former Americans. He had conceived a plan for the area to be occupied by French settlers who had no ties across the border which would reduce the smuggling along the new border between the Loyalists and their former compatriots. He was also concerned that there would also be conflicts between them. Thus the Loyalists were barred from putting down roots in this area, a terrible blow to them as many had started to clear land and build farms. And so, in 1784, the British forcibly moved many of these Loyalist families to Caraquai (Baiecomeau) and the Gaspé peninsula. Nonetheless some 75 people defiantly refused to leave, even though their provisions were cut off.

After Governor Haldimand was recalled to England in 1785, British policy shifted with regard to the opening of the Eastern Townships, and the Mississquoi Loyalist settlers successfully petitioned his successor for the return of their properties. Three, however, unsuccessful in their petition to grant them the entire area between the St. Armand Seignory and Lake Memphremagog. Two individuals stand out at this time as important political figures: Guy Carleton, who was responsible for the political reforms instituted in the Constitutional Act of 1791, and William Smith, who introduced the Leader and Associate system under which the Eastern Townships came to be settled.

The Leader and Associate System
To understand the Leader and Associate System, it is important to consider British constitutional theory of the 18th century, which was based on the idea that every one had a place in the political system, which made for a stable society. The colonies were to be organized in a similar fashion as in England, with the Governor being the King's representative and membership on the Legislative and Executive Councils was restricted to the aristocracy. Fearing that the rising strength of the merchant class would upset the balance of power between the Governor and the legislative bodies, as it had in the American colonies, the British supported the idea of establishing a hereditary aristocracy in Canada. This was to be achieved through the Leader and Associate system, whereby a proprietor and privileged elite would be granted very large holdings of land. The Leader would not be required to purchase the land but he would be expected to bear the expenses related to the registration of deeds, surveying and agents' fees, laying roads etc. Each Associate who came with the leader would be granted 1,200 acres of which 1,000 acres had to be handed over to the Leader, creating a propertied and privileged elite. William Smith, Lower Canada's Chief Magistrate, was convinced that there were thousands of settlers waiting to pour into Canada from the United States, and this system would "generate the surplus necessary to create an aristocracy." The Proclamation of Government of Lower Canada in 1792, officially opened the Eastern Townships for settlement. Petitioners had to prove that they
During the American Revolution, Nicholas Austin made a few of exploratory trips to the Eastern Townships. In 1789 he applied for a Township grant in Vale Perkins part of the Lake Memphremagog area. He started clearing 60 acres of land there on the southwest shore of the lake and began building a road from Pondon to Bolton. However, the Land Committee ignored his petition and offered him land in Stanchfield. Which he refused as too marshy. His request for land in Pottson or Sutton was also denied. Instead, he was offered Bolton Township where he eventually settled on the shore of Lake Memphremagog in 1792. In 1793, he sold his property in Middleton, New Hamphire, for 660£, an important amount for the time. and moved to Bolton Township with his wife and at least four of his seven children. They cleared the land with three yokes of oxen and with workers to clear the land. Along the way, they stayed of allegiance, they were told to come back another year as there was no one to take their oath. This went on until 1795, when the government officially opened the land registry system. Many settlers found themselves in a difficult situation trying to get their land registry offices in the area of Mississouga Bay, to swear an oath of allegiance in 1795 and his land grant was approved relatively quickly. Yet problems of inaction in getting the Warrant of Survey. He presented a list of sixty four Associates; eleven of who or abandoned these commercial activities, or undertaken new developments. The Executive Council and the Land Committee were made up largely of British merchants, who were interested in land speculation in the Eastern Townships, e.g. Hugh Finlay, Thomas Dunn, etc. Austin also had problems which were different from the challenges facing other Leaders. Some of his Associates, such as Robert Mansan, could not see any reason why 1,000 acres of land should be handed over. (Manson was finally persuaded to do so, and he did transfer these acres to Austin, keeping 200 acres for himself.) Other Associates had never intended to settle in Canada and they refused to give up the agreed upon acres. Some had died together and sold their portions, some 1,200, to George Cook. Austin was famous and hiring a lawyer to defend himself. He traveled to Montreal to fight his case. He made his way to the south shore of the St. Lawrence river, where he expected to find a boatman to ferry him across to attend the court hearing. Cook had caught wind of this arrangement, and he crossed the river in his place. When Nicholas Austin arrived at the riverbank, there was no boatman to take him across. He lost his case for not appearing in court and returned home a broken man. Nicholas Austin led an eventful life; he had big ideas and pursued his plans with much energy. Yet he endured many setbacks and did not reap much benefit from his work. His nephew, also called Nicholas Austin II, and his son, Nicholas Austin III, however were very active and resourceful in developing the area. Mills were built, roads so. They all needed to do was apply for a Township, survey it and promise to settle it within three years. Afterwards they could sell off lots in a speculative market. Both the Executive Council and the Land Committee were made up largely of British merchant-colonists, who were interested in land speculation in the Eastern Townships, e.g. Hugh Finlay, Thomas Dunn, etc. Austin also had problems which were different from the challenges facing the other Leaders. Some of his Associates, such as Robert Mansan, could not see any reason why 1,000 acres of land should be handed over. (Manson was finally persuaded to do so, and he did transfer these acres to Austin, keeping 200 acres for himself.) Other Associates had never intended to settle in Canada and they refused to give up the agreed upon acres. Some had died together and sold their portions, some 1,200, to George Cook. Austin was famous and hiring a lawyer to defend himself. He traveled to Montreal to fight his case. He made his way to the south shore of the St. Lawrence river, where he expected to find a boatman to ferry him across to attend the court hearing. Cook had caught wind of this arrangement, and he crossed the river in his place. When Nicholas Austin arrived at the riverbank, there was no boatman to take him across. He lost his case for not appearing in court and returned home a broken man. Nicholas Austin died in 1821, a poor and discouraged man. His wife Phlebe lived on for another twenty years. According to his Quaker beliefs, Austin is buried in an unmarked grave somewhere in Gibralter Point. A commemorative stone has been erected nearby in his memory. Nicholas Austin's Legacy Nicholas Austin led an eventful life; he had big ideas and pursued his plans with much energy. Yet he endured many setbacks and did not reap much benefit from his work. His nephew, also called Nicholas Austin II, and his son, Nicholas Austin III, however were very active and resourceful in developing the area. Mills were built, roads and cleared for farms, particularly in the sector called The Head of the Bay. Gibralter Point, Head of the Bay. The role of the pioneers of the first generation (1794-1825) gave way to consolidation of the means of production such as the construction of different mills (gran, wool and saw mills) and a forge in the second generation (1824-1945). But by the third generation (1846-1870), many moved away or abandoned these commercial activities, rather than to undertake new developments. The Austin descendants married and their children intermarried with other local families. While the name of Austin no longer appears in the village rolls, his legacy lives on in names such as Ball and Duckworth. One of his descendants, Austin Duckworth, author of a film dedicated to his ancestor, wrote: “Nicholas Austin had a vision of a new society. Austin was a man who came from a family of New Hampshire merchants and farmers, a family, which had prospered in spite of Puritan esthetic and did not accept religious dissidents. The people of the municipality of Austin are deeply indebted to this pioneer and proud of his legacy.” Nicholas Austin was the leader of a group of American Quakers who, with their families, moved to Canada to settle in the Eastern Townships. 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of allegiance, they were told to come back another year as there was no one to take their oath. This went on until 1795, when the government finally opened the land registry. Even at this point, when the American settlers did present themselves, they were still turned away because they had not taken an Oath of Allegiance. With all the confusion and hardship they had faced, many Loyalists gave up and moved back to the United States. Others fought for their claims and incurred heavy debts while trying to obtain clear title.

Yet problems lingered amid complaints of government corruption at this time. Under the French Executive Council and the Land Committee were made up largely of British merchants who were interested in land speculation in the Eastern Townships, e.g. Hugh Finlay, Thomas Dunn, etc. Nicholas Austin had also problems which were different from the challenges facing the other Leaders. Some of his Associates, such as Robert Manson, could not see any reason why 1,000 acres of land should be handed over. (Manson was finally persuaded to do so, and he did transfer these acres to Austin, keeping 200 acres for himself.) Other Associates had never intended to settle in Canada and they refused to give up the agreed upon acres. Some had sold them together and sold their portions, some 1,200 acres, to George Cook. Austin was furious and hiring a lawyer to defend himself, he traveled to Montreal to fight his case. He made his way to the south shore of the St. Lawrence river, where he expected to find a boatman to ferry him across to attend the court hearing. Cook had caught wind of this arrangement, and he crossed the river in his place. When Nicholas Austin arrived at the riverbank, there was no boatman to take him across. He lost his case for not appearing in court and returned home a broken man.

By the early 1800’s he was seriously in debt even being sued by Mrs. Samuel Willard, the widow of another Leader, for an unpaid bill. Finally in 1808, 1,200 acres of land held in Bolton were sold at a Sheriff’s auction to pay his debts.

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Nicholas Austin’s Legacy

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The Austin descendants married and their children intermarried with other local families. While the name of Austin no longer appears in the village rolls, his legacy lives on in names such as Ball and Dockworth. One of his descendants, Martin Dockworth, author of a film dedicated to his ancestor, writes: “Nicholas Austin had a vision of a new society. Austin and his fellow Leaders came from a family of New Hampshire merchants and farmers, a family, which had prospered in spite of Puritan establishment’s persecution of religious dissidents. The people of the municipality of Austin are deeply indebted to this pioneer and proud of his legacy.”