

A MAN CALLED LUDDEN

**James Ludden, Wessagusset Colony Settler, Planter, and
Governor John Winthrop's Guide to Plymouth**



Illustration from James Ludden, the Old Planter, 1611-1692 and Descendants ("Old Planter"), Wallace Ludden, p. 10 (1971), from The History and Antiquities of Boston, Samuel Drake, p. 146 (1856)

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James Ludden

James Ludden was a settler, landowner and planter in the Wessagusset Colony at Weymouth. He arrived at Wessagusset (Wessaguscus) in September 1623 with the Sir Ferdinando Gorges Company¹ lead by Gorges' son, Captain Robert Gorges, along with 120 other settlers arriving on the *Katherine* and *Prophet Daniel*. The company occupied the abandoned trading colony established in 1622 by London Merchant Adventurer, Thomas Weston,² inhabiting the same timber houses and block house within the palisade wall constructed by Weston's settlers. The new colony endured only one winter at Wessagusset, after which Captain Gorges and others from the settlement returned to England,³ while still others relocated to Plymouth, Virginia, and elsewhere along the New England coast,⁴ leaving only John Bursley (Burslam), Gorges' agent, William Jeffries (Jeffreys), "***and a man called Ludden***"⁵ as the remaining English settlers.

James Ludden's Arrival at Wessagusset, 1623-1632

Little is known about Ludden's first nine years at Wessagusset. Born in 1611 in Dorsetshire, England, he arrived at Wessagusset with the Gorges company as an eleven-year-old,

¹ Gorges had received a patent incorporating 40 persons into the Council for New England, a private colonization and trading company. The Council received its authority from King James and was granted the waters between the Nahant headland and Point Allerton as well as over 200,000 acres of land in Essex and Middlesex counties. An Investigation into Weston's Colony at Wessagusset, Craig Chartier, p. 12 (2011)

² Six months before Gorges' arrival at Wessagusset, nine Plymouth colony separatists lead by Captain Miles Standish and guided by their Algonquin ally, Hobbamock, had conducted a preemptive military strike against the Massachusetts Indian tribe to prevent a planned coordinated attack on both the Plymouth and Wessagusset colonies. During the course of the assault, Massachusetts warrior Wituwamet was beheaded, and Pecksuot was killed along with five other Natives. Their sachem, Aberdikes (Abtakiest, Chicatabut) was shot in the arm with a musket, but escaped.

³ After making considerable efforts to locate and sanction Thomas Weston, the "Merchant Adventurer" financier of both the Plymouth and Wessagusset colonies for having abandoned his ill-equipped and starved 1622 Wessagusset settlement, and for selling a cannon intended for colonial defenses, Gorges abandoned the Wessagusset colony in the spring of 1624 and returned to England on the advice of his father because the Council of New England had lost investors. History of Weymouth, Published by the Weymouth Historical Society, Vol. 1, pp. 57-59 (1923)

⁴ Some settlers who relocated from Wessagusset when Gorges returned to London in 1624 became a "Who's Who" of frontier pioneers along the New England coast, including Reverend William Blackstone, the first English settler on the Shawmut peninsula (his image is depicted on the Boston Founders Memorial greeting Gov. Winthrop), Rev. Samuel Maverick to Wnnisimmet (Chelsea) in 1624, and Thomas Walford to Mischuwum (Charlestown) at the mouth of the Mystic River. Perhaps most famously, one year earlier Thomas Morton from the 1622 Weston Colony settled at Merry Mount (Braintree/Quincy) replacing the absent Captain Richard Wollaston until being arrested by Miles Standish while visiting friends (likely William Jeffries, who Morton had addressed as "My very good gossip") at Wessagusset in 1628, and then deported to England for Merry Mount's beer drinking, Maypole frolicking and weapon trading proclivities. (Colonial Weymouth, The Forgotten Second Settlement, Mark Schneider, p. 88-89 (2021) Ironically, while under Standish's armed guard at Wessagusset, Morton escaped his confinement and returned to Merry Mount, because Standish's guards themselves had over-indulged during their overnight watch. (New English Canaan, Thomas Morton, pp. 141-143 (1637)

⁵ In the History of Norfolk County Massachusetts by Louis A. Cook (1918), it was noted that James Ludden was recognized as a member of the 1623 Gorges company along with Bursley and Jeffries, which arrived in Wessagusset, and who had "*no doubt maintained their residence there from the year 1623.*" (Cook, p. 293) "*Of the 123 landowners mentioned by Mr. Nash [in his History of Weymouth], only seventeen are recognized as members of the Hull company which arrived in 1635. John Bursley, William Jeffries and a man named Ludden are recognized as members of the Gorges company . . .*" (p. 293)

likely as a servant to Bursley and/or Jeffries. Before the arrival of a scattering of other English settlers, the Wessagusset settlement was known also as the Bursley and Jeffries settlement.⁶ It is recorded that in 1631, Ludden married Mary Johnson (born 1614), the daughter of Davy and Elizabeth Johnson of Weymouth. He later married Alice Kinham (born 1613-1614).⁷ James Ludden died in Weymouth in 1693.⁸

James Ludden – Winthrop’s Guide to Plymouth Colony, 1632

By at least October 1632, at age 21, Ludden had become sufficiently familiar with the New England frontier and its Native footpaths to have offered his assistance, or perhaps to have been commissioned, to guide Governor John Winthrop and his traveling company from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in Boston to visit Governor William Bradford at the Plymouth Colony.⁹ It was, of course, during this overland trip from Wessagusset to Plymouth that Ludden carried Winthrop over the Indian Head River at Hanover and Pembroke, which inspired Winthrop, a prodigious diarist, to memorialize the event in his journal, and to name the river crossing “*Luddam’s Ford*” in Ludden’s honor. Specifically, we learn from Winthrop’s journal that after leaving Plymouth on the morning of October 31, 1632, to return to Wessagusset, Ludden and the Winthrop party:

[C]ame to the great river, they were carried over by one Luddam, their guide, (as they had been when they came, the stream being very strong, and up to the crotch;) so the governor called that passage Luddam’s Ford.¹⁰

This passage is derived from James Savage’s transcription of Winthrop’s journal. There are no other known primary historical sources referencing the events of the river crossing, including from Ludden himself.

Locally, historical references to the river crossing presumably were derived from Winthrop’s journal. John Stetson Barry’s 1853 A Historical Sketch of the Town of Hanover, Mass. identifies “Ludden” as Winthrop’s guide. At page 209, Barry writes “*Ludden’s Ford, so called, is near here, over which Gov. Winthrop was carried upon a man’s back, on his visit to Plymouth in 1632.*” Also, Jedediah Dwelley and John Simmon’s History of the Town of Hanover,

⁶ An Investigation into Weston’s Colony of Wessagusset, Craig Chartier, 2011, p. 13 (“Wessagusset was recorded as being also called ‘Jeffries and Burslem’s plantation’ after two of the settlers who Gorges left behind.” “After the assault on Merrymount and Thomas Morton in 1628, the settlers at Plymouth assessed the Jefferies and Burslem plantation a rate for the expedition against Morton (Dean 1856).” See also, Historical Address by Charles Francis Adams, Jr., p. 35 (1874).

⁷ See History of Weymouth, George Walter Chamberlain, 1922, vol. 3., pp. 411-412. Also, Gilbert Nash’s Sketch of Weymouth, at page 249, provides a list, Appendix A, of passengers with Reverend Joseph Hull’s company which departed from “Waymouth,” England on March 30, 1635, which included “Alice Kinham aged 22 years.”

⁸ Massachusetts Vital Statistics, 1620 to 1850, Weymouth Deaths, Vol. 2, page 303, Death records of James Ludden.

⁹ Winthrop’s trip to Wessagusset occurred 2 ½ years after his March 1630 arrival at Charlestown, and withdrawn later on the Shawmut peninsula, on the *Arbella* as the elected Massachusetts Bay colony governor. He landed at the Wessagusset settlement on the Fore River on a shallop from the *Lyon* piloted by Captain William Pierce. He and other Massachusetts Bay colony settlers, including the Puritan pastor of Boston, Reverend John Wilson, arrived on October 25, 1632, to embark on a 27-mile journey on foot along the Bay Path, a native Indian trail to Plymouth.

¹⁰ Winthrop’s Journal “History of New England, Edited by James Kendall Hosmer, Vol, I, p. 94 (1908).

Massachusetts (1910) references “Ludden’s Ford” on 3 occasions (pages 271, 282 and 284), although text on page 271 equivocates, describing “*Ludden’s or Luddam’s Ford: Near the Rubber Mill at Pembroke line.*”¹¹

George Chamberlain, writing in the History of Weymouth, Vol. 3, p. 411 (1923), described the river crossing as follows: “In describing his return from Plymouth Colony to Wessagusset on 31 Oct. 1632, Gov. John Winthrop said: “When they [the company] came to the great [North] river, they were carried over by one Luddam, their guide (as they had been when they came, the stream being very strong, and up to the crotch), so the governour called the passage Luddam’s Ford. . . .” Chamberlain further commented that “James Ludden is the only known man of the name in New England who could have rendered this service as guide.”

Samuel Drake in The History and Antiquities of Boston, p. 145 (1856), described the event as follows: “when they came to the Great river, they were carried over by one Ludham, as they had when they went.” In an accompanying footnote, Drake commented that: “The name *Ludden* occurs on Weymouth records, 1680.” This note suggests that Drake had researched Ludden’s identity, beyond reviewing Winthrop’s October 31, 1632, journal entry and transcription, to enable him to provide the correct spelling according to local municipal records.¹²

In History of Scituate, Massachusetts from its First Settlement to 1831, published in 1831, Samuel Deane, at pages 162-163 wrote:

Ludden’s Ford, on North river above North river bridge on Plymouth road. Gov. Winthrop in his pedestrian journey to Plymouth in 1632, (Winthrop I, 92), named it Luddam’s Ford, “from Mr. Luddam their guide,” who carried over the Governor and Rev. Mr. Wilson on his back. We have no doubt that James Ludden,* an early settler in Weymouth, was this guide, who had the honor to carry his Excellency *a-pick-back*.

Notably, Deane’s footnote (*) commented that, “In the Weymouth records we notice Mary daughter of James and Alice Ludden, born 1633 – Sara 1639. Sara married Daniel Fairfield 1659.”

¹¹ There is no explanation why Dwelley and Simmons offered “Luddam” as an alternative spelling, but it is strongly suspected that their source was Savage’s transcription of Winthrop’s journal, although they later themselves misspell Ludden as “Luddan” at page 206.

¹² In a separate footnote at page 146, Drake provides the following further note: “. . . those, of course, who have heard that anecdote [related to Daniel Webster himself ferrying a visitor on his back across a creek in Marshfield], can fancy how the Governor of Massachusetts looked on the neck of *John Ludham*, fording the Great river, ‘the water being up to the crotch.’ Winthrop’s annotator [Thomas Savage] gives the name of the *ferry-man*, Luddam, but I follow [Thomas] Prince, who followed or used Winthrop in the original. For the poetical part of the name I am responsible.” This comment suggests that Drake questioned Savage’s transcription of “Luddam” from Winthrop’s manuscript, and instead chose to adopt Prince’s “Ludham”, despite his independent research on the matter. It is worth noting that Drake was a critic of Savage’s second edition of Winthrop’s History of New England, having written a scorching 23-page review of it in A Review of Winthrop’s Journal (1853) to the New England Historical and Genealogical Society. Finally, Drake’s reference to “the poetical part of the name” may be to his reference to “*John Ludham*”, vicar of Wethersfield, Essex (1570-1613), the 17th Century English translator of the works of Flemish Protestant theologian and reformer Andreas Hyperius.

Most recently, Mark Schneider in his book, Colonial Weymouth, The Forgotten Second Settlement, p. 96 (2021), described the river crossing as follows: “Governor Winthrop stopped at Wessagusset on his journey to and from Plymouth in 1632. Upon his return, Winthrop and his party were ferried over the North River by James Ludden of Wessagusset.” While this brief contemporary description of the crossing does not present a primary source of information, it nevertheless reflects Ludden’s widely documented and accepted spelling.

James Ludden at Wessagusset and Weymouth

At Wessagusset (incorporated by the Massachusetts Bay Colony as Weymouth in 1635), Ludden would raise six children,¹³ remarry, and be granted land by the Weymouth settlement along the Eastern Neck (now Fort Point) and the Back River south from Great Hill.¹⁴ He registered for military service, along with his sons, in defense of the English colonists.

In 1642, ten years after guiding Gov. Winthrop between Wessagusset and Plymouth, James “Luddon” was among eight witnesses to the signing of the land deed between the Massachusetts tribe, including Wampetuc, and Weymouth settlers, which granted the Town land rights to their inhabited territory. Forty-three years later, in July 1685, a clarification to the recorded deed attested that “James Ludden Senior” of Weymouth, age 74, was the last surviving witness to the “Deed of Sale made by the Indians of ye Towne of Waymoth”. Ludden declared that he witnessed the 1642 execution of the deed by the Indians, and was present when the other witnesses from Weymouth signed their names to the deed. The document was entered in the records of Suffolk County, in which Weymouth then belonged.

The History of Weymouth, Vol. 2, page 946-947 (1923), provides the following description of the Ludden family, which was by then extinct in the town:

LUDDEN

The name of Ludden occurs also very early, even prior to that of the Kings. James Ludden recording the name of a daughter Dec. 17, 1636, and it is quite probable that there were children older than she. Their property was situated in Old Spain, and extended from Great Hill and Eastern Neck to Back River. . . . This family also extends through four generations, the last birth occurring Jan. 4, 1719, and is recorded as that of Benjamin, the son of Benjamin and Sarah. It was also a prominent family, and one that enjoyed the respect of the community. Their estate was probably one of the original grants, and like many of that class, long and comparatively narrow, laid out from the shore to the bay and extending for a considerable distance inland.

¹³ Mary (1636), Sara (1639), Sara (1642), James (1644), Joseph (1646, a mariner who was lost at sea), Benjamin (1650), and John (1656), son of James and his second wife, Alice (Kinham) Ludden). Old Planter, p. 12 and 14.

¹⁴ Ludden’s property was located in North Weymouth (then called “Old Spain” although no historical documents explain why it was called this according to Charles Francis Adams, Jr. in his address to the Massachusetts Historical Society, Historical Address by Charles Francis Adams, Jr., p. 5 (1874).

The History of Weymouth, p. 411, further records that James Ludden has been called an “old planter.”¹⁵ He had lots granted to him early, a “great lot” granted in February 1655-52, eight acres in the “First Division” and twenty-four acres in the “Second Division” granted in December 1663. In October 1688, Ludden filed a Last Will and Testament in which he deposed as follows:

To his son Benjamin he gave 24 acres ‘upon or near that place in the Woods called Carpenter’s Plains,’ to his son Joseph, ‘if he be yet surviving or doth yet appear to be living,’ two acres in his house lot and two acres upon the island. His son James to have all remaining, including his homestead. ‘If my son Joseph should never returne nor be heard of any more,’ the lands given him shall be confirmed unto his son James. The use of his whole estate to be at the dispose of his wife (not named) during her life, provided she do not dispose of it from his children. She to be executrix and sons James and Benjamin executors. His wife to have his personal estate and to bestow what she sees meets upon his grandchildren. His friend Richard Phillips and John Bicknell, overseers. Witnesses: James Humphrey, James Steward, Joseph Poole and Nathaniel Humphrey.

Probate granted to his son, the surviving executor, 16 Feb. 1692-1693, James Ludden (Suffolk Probate Records, 13:121-123.)

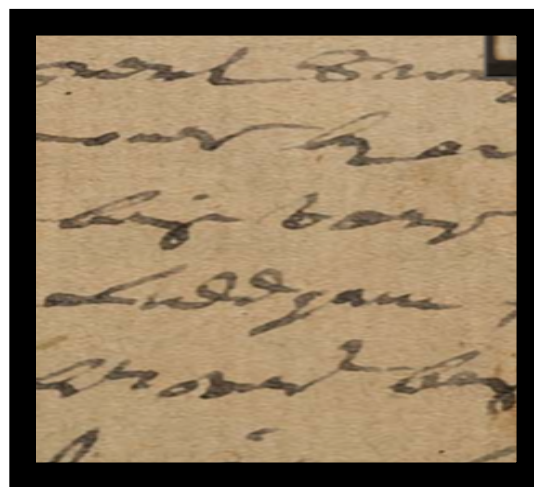
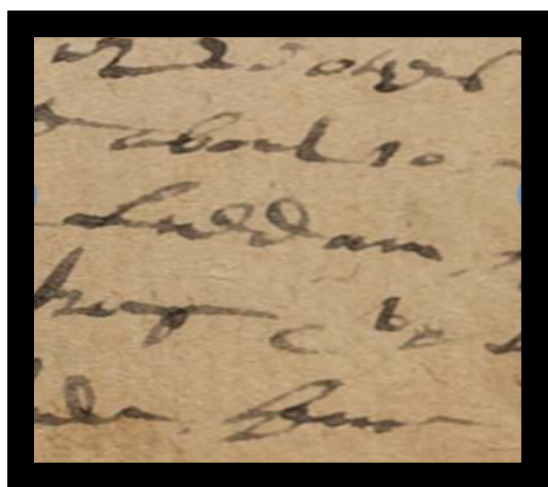
Gov. Winthrop’s Journal

Why is the crossing at the Indian Head River in Hanover and Pembroke named in James Ludden’s honor by Governor Winthrop called “*Luddam’s Ford*”? It is possible that Winthrop correctly wrote “Ludden” in his journal when memorializing the event, but that the transcribers, James Savage in 1825 and 1853 and James Kendall Hosmer in 1908 (who adopted Savages text save for one or two deletions), mistook Winthrop’s handwritten “e” and “n” for “a” and “m”. More likely, however, Winthrop merely spelled the name as he heard it spoken phonetically directly by Ludden, just as he had done a short distance later on the return trip in Hanover when he wrote Hughes or Hughs’ Cross as “Hues Cross” when describing the location of that local landmark.¹⁶

¹⁵ In Massachusetts, “old planters” were settlers of lands on Massachusetts Bay that were not part of Plymouth Colony or Massachusetts Bay Colony. Old Planters proved through their hard work that settlement was possible. Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, Alexander Young(1846); See also, Planters of Early New England, E. Bruce Butler (2009)

¹⁶ In Winthrop’s translated journal, at page 94, and in Jedediah Dwelley and John Simmon’s 1910 History of the Town of Hanover, at page 270, Winthrop wrote “*After crossing the North River we came to a place called Hues Cross.*” Dwelley’s research, at page 271, revealed that Hughes’ Cross, was named after John Hughes, a resident of Scituate, and that a “well-authenticated story of Hughes crossing this stream and being frightened by a wolf.” Dwelley’s book locates “Hughes’ Cross Brook” where Ludden and Winthrop’s party crossed as being located at the “South Branch of the Third Herring brook,” and that Curtis’ mill stood on the brook. We also know that Hughes’ Crossing marked the northern termination point of William Barstow’s contract with the Massachusetts Bay Colony to construct a road from his bridge over the North River in 1656. Dwelley and Simmons, History of the Town of Hanover, at page 222. Specifically, Dwelley and Simmons wrote, “*Washington street from North River bridge to Scituate line and beyond was laid out in 1653 by a jury of which Cornet Robert Stetson was foreman; and in 1656 William Barstow was authorized ‘to build a bridge across North river and to clear and mark a way to Hughes’ Cross and to open and clear and make a way along beyond Hughes’ Cross toward the Bay so as to avoid a certain rocky hill and swamp, he to have 12 £ county pay for so doing.’*” Thus, this is an example of contemporary historians (in 1910) correcting an erroneous spelling based on reliable scholarship.

Understandably, neither Winthrop nor Savage, the 9th Century transcriber, would have sought to confirm Ludden's identity and spelling, as the river crossing was not a particularly important event in Winthrop's historic trip to the Plymouth colony.¹⁷ There is no record of Savage having inquired who the Luddens of the Wessagusset colony were, what they called themselves, or what the existing municipal or county property and probate records reflected. Moreover, Winthrop's handwriting, according to later transcribers and historians, was notoriously poor and difficult to decipher.¹⁸ Although one of Winthrop's two Ludden references reasonably could have been transcribed by the untrained eye as "Luddam," as Savage did, the second reference appears to read "Luddgam". See image of Winthrop manuscript below.



These two images come from the manuscript, page 62 of the Massachusetts Historical Society's Collections Online of John Winthrop's journal, *History of New England* (manuscript) Volume 1, at masshist.org, and depict a closeup of Winthrop's handwriting of "Ludden". Query whether Winthrop wrote in his journal while taking rests along the trail, at Wessagusset, aboard the *Lyon* on his return sail to Boston, or at his Ten Hills Farm estate along the Mystic River.

Ludden – The Family Name Over Twelve Generations

With few exceptions in written instruments and historical texts from Weymouth and the Massachusetts Bay Colony, James Ludden's name was spelled and transcribed correctly, and was passed on to his children and descendants. Notably, there was no known "Luddam" family in

¹⁷ At Plymouth, Winthrop met his Plymouth Colony counterpart, Governor Bradford, the settlement's elder, John Winslow, and Roger Williams, who Reverend Wilson, who was also on the trip, famously would vote to ban from the Massachusetts Bay Colony four years later in 1636.

¹⁸ The Massachusetts Historical Society, in its Introduction to "[Papers of the Winthrop Family, Vol. 2](#)," commented as follows regarding translations of the Winthrop journals: "No edition of Governor Winthrop's Journal can present the text of the manuscript exactly as he wrote it. The author's handwriting is notoriously difficult, compared even with that of his contemporaries, and large sections written with inferior ink have almost completely faded. Certain pages can be deciphered only with the aid of the photostat. The task of transcription is often double: first, one must identify the word itself, and second, one must decide just how Winthrop chose to spell that word on that occasion. Cancellations, additions, and retracings, sometimes add to the confusion." "In many instances one can do no better than guess whether Winthrop meant to use a final "e" or not, or a capital or small letter. It is impossible to establish a text to which no exception will be taken."

Wessagusset or elsewhere in the colony.¹⁹ Indeed, the family name was duly recorded as “Ludden” over the next 400 years.

Ludden descendants eventually married or sold their land grant rights in Weymouth and settled in neighboring Braintree, and then further west in the Massachusetts colony to the Connecticut River valley, north to Massachusetts’ colonial territory in the Province of Maine, and then across the continent. A comprehensive family genealogy was published in 1971 by one particular descendant, Wallace Ludden, who meticulously documented the origin, history and migration of the Ludden family over those many generations. Many Ludden descendants made substantial and lasting contributions to their English colonial communities, to the survival of the English colonists in New England, and even to American independence.²⁰

James Ludden’s sons Benjamin and John, enlisted for service in the colonial army. Benjamin, participated in a military excursion to Canada in 1690, and was killed, predeceasing his father. Benjamin had married Eunice Holbrook of Weymouth in 1678, the daughter of Captain John Holbrook. His death is recorded in the History of Weymouth, Vol. 3, pp. 412-413. He had prepared a last will and testament before decamping to the Connecticut Valley as a soldier, in which he reflected on his possible fate: “I Benjamin Ludden in New England, being now called forth as a soldier of the Christ and people of God in New England, namely those Bloody, Murderous and Salvage Indians, and considering whether I may return again to my life to see my parents, wife and relations. Committing my soul to God that gave it . . .”²¹

John Ludden, who enlisted on April 7, 1676, served under Captain William Turner and participated in the “Falls Fight” in present day Turner’s Falls.²² It is known that he survived the battle, as his name is referenced in the Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920, Vol. 3, pg. 974, and Records of the Suffolk County Court, 1671-1680, I and II “Sessions of 29 October 1678, which reported - “Among the people who have taken the oath of Allegiance from Weymouth were James Ludden Senr. John Ludden.”

Also of special interest is Joseph Ludden, James Ludden’s great grandson, who was among the “Sons of Liberty” who disguised themselves as Mohawk Indians and participated in the Boston Tea Party on December 16, 1773. Joseph Ludden was born in Braintree in 1753, later moved to North Yarmouth in the Province of Maine, and died in 1829. His descendants continued to celebrate his role as a member of the Sons of Liberty and their revolutionary spirit.²³

¹⁹ James Ludden was referenced in a publication called Pioneers of Massachusetts by Charles Henry Pope at page 294, which reads under the name heading “Luddam, Ludden,” “James, servant to William Almy and David Johnson, settled at Weymouth, corporal, town officer. Children were Mary, born 17 Oct. 1636; Sarah born 15 Sept. 1639; and another Sarah born 5 March 1642.” Ludden also had four sons, Benjamin, Joseph, James and John.

²⁰ See James Ludden, the Old Planter, 1611-1692 and Descendants (“Old Planter”).

²¹ Old Planter, p. 16.

²² New England Genealogical Register, Vol. 41, page 79. It is known that he survived the battle, as his name is referenced in the Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1920, Vol. 3, pg. 974, and Records of the Suffolk County Court, 1671-1680, I and II “Sessions of 29 October 1678 (“Among the people who have taken the oath of Allegiance from Weymouth were James Ludden Senr. John Ludden.”)

²³ Old Planter, pp. 35, 53, 56.

Correcting the Historical Record

The adoption of the name “Luddam” instead of “Ludden” by two local historical commissions, Hanover and Pembroke, to designate the ford and adjacent parkland presents an interesting conundrum - whether, when and how to remedy a historical inaccuracy; and what amount and quality of scholarship is sufficient to adopt a change?

In the instant case, may historical commissions ignore the absence of reliable historical support for the existence of the name “Luddam” and maintain the existing designation on the grounds that it has become familiar to this current generation of residents; or should they be willing to correct inaccuracies in the historic record even when local landmarks and traditions have been developed on the inaccuracy?

Consider perhaps what Governor Winthrop would have proposed if presented with this question? Can we presume he had intended to bestow an honor onto James Ludden for his service as a sturdy guide through the early Massachusetts colonial wilderness? Would he agree that his intention to honor Ludden would be diminished by an innocent, albeit incorrect acknowledgement. Consider also whether Ludden family descendants, who now likely number in the hundreds and span the continent, would welcome the correction to the local historic record so that both current and later generations of James Ludden’s descendants could be certain, and proud, of the direct lineage to their first American ancestor, and to his place in New England colonial history.