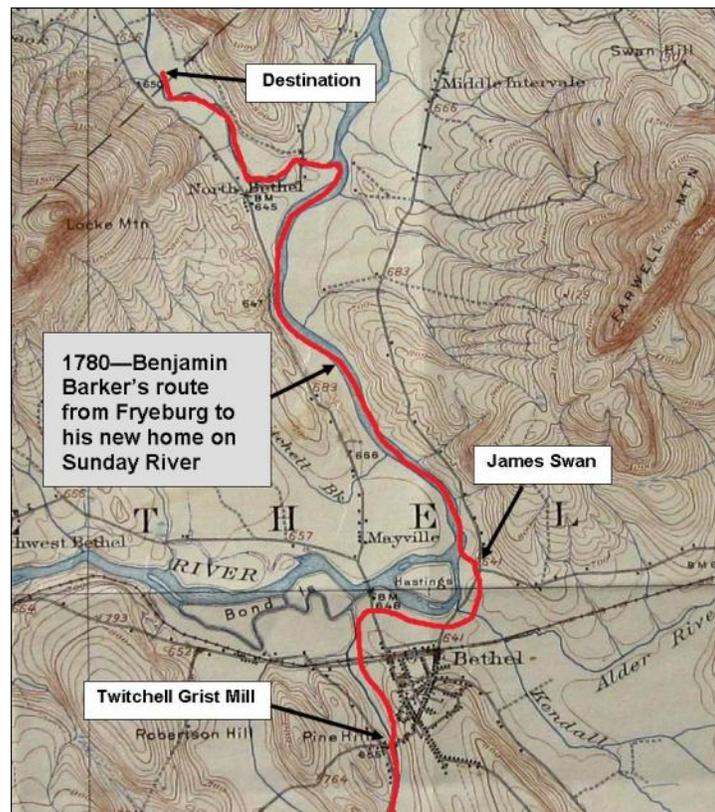


# The Barker Pioneers

Three brothers, Benjamin, Jesse and Jonathan Barker, became the first three settlers in Sunday River.

In the following pages, actually Chapter 10 of a manuscript entitled “The Andover Connection”, author Howard Kaepplin tells the story of their motivations, challenges and journey from Methuen, Massachusetts to Fryeburg in the District of Maine and then to Sunday River.



James (Swan), his two sons, and Benjamin loaded the tools and supplies they needed and sailed up the Androscoggin to its junction with an unnamed river which flowed south. They tied up the sloop and walked along its banks. James pointed ahead to a mountain on their left.



Until 1947 this old house stood on the Sunday River Road only a few hundred yards from the Bethel-Newry town line, the same site where Benjamin Barker built his frame house not too long after his arrival in 1780. The Barker's house was probably a one story building similar to another one less than a mile away that still stands.

## INTRODUCTION

Before you read this detailed, very interesting account of what it took Sunday River's earliest settlers who gambled their all for a new life in the wilderness, you may ask yourself, "How did this story get started anyway?" Author Howard Kaeppelein is a descendant of Jonathan Barker, one of the three pioneer brothers. In his research of the Barker family, he discovered that in 1788 only seven years after getting to Sunday River, Jonathan who would marry Nancy Swan, the daughter of James Swan who lived near Alder River, took his bride-to-be on the hazardous hike, canoe and sail journey back to Acton, Massachusetts to get married. This question inspired Mr. Kaeppelein to dig further.

This marriage, said Kaeppelein, raised many questions for me, to which I felt compelled to find answers. The answer it turned out lay in the deaths and injustices of the "witch hysteria" which had gripped the town of Andover, Mass. in 1692. The third and critical player in the Acton marriage and the reason why Nancy and Jonathan had to travel all the way to Acton to be married, was Col. Francis Faulkner, the Justice of the Peace. He was the grandson of Abigail Dane Faulkner, who was sentenced to be hanged for witchcraft in 1692 based on the testimony of William Barker. It was a marriage of reconciliation, demanded by the first Barker in Andover, to save his own soul, after death.

## CHAPTER TEN – *The Barker Pioneers*

Jesse Barker arrived home from his Revolutionary War service to find that Benjamin had already left on his own for Fryeburg. He and Lydia had married in March as soon as they learned she was pregnant. Since Molly had already married and moved out, and Jesse and Samuel were away in the army, there was room for Lydia to move into the Barker house. However, there were awkward moments and they longed to have their own place.

Benjamin did not want to build a house on his father's land, since he wanted to move to Fryeburg soon. So, he and Lydia agreed he should go to Maine alone to build a house for them. Lydia would follow with her baby when Jesse and Jonathan went. Lydia's baby, Elijah, was born a few weeks after Benjamin left.

Samuel Barker finally arrived home on January 8th, 1781, exhausted and hungry. It was cause for celebration at the Barker household. Elaborate preparations were made for a feast, to be attended by their extended family and friends.

Molly came with her husband, Solomon and their 10-month-old baby, Elijah, and two of Solomon's brothers. Benjamin's wife, Lydia and her 3-month-old son, Elijah, returned from a visit to Lydia's parents home, bringing her sister, Hannah. They roasted a pig on the spit in the fireplace and Abigail, Molly and Hannah prepared pea soup, roasted root vegetables, beans, johnnycakes, pickled beets and carrot pudding.

When Lydia and Hannah arrived, they approached Samuel. "Welcome home, Samuel, do you remember us?"

"I remember going with Benjamin to meeting at Boxford and how you both exchanged glances from across the aisle."

Hannah took Samuel's hand, with a smile asking, "Do you remember me, Samuel?"

"We were just children then, but I do remember you. I believe you smiled at me, too."

"I did, and so did you, but you also blushed. I really liked you for that."

Lydia moved away, leaving Samuel and Hannah to talk.

"Benjamin told me that you were a hero at Saratoga."

"My brother exaggerates. Benedict Arnold was the hero; he led the charge between enemy lines and took two balls in his leg. He was in the hospital for six months. General Learned was close behind Arnold and the rest of the brigade followed him. I just ran like hell, and when we reached our goal, we had closed the escape route for Burgoyne's troops."

"It was a major victory for our side. Everyone was talking about it. I bet you did more than you say."

"Probably my biggest contribution was playing my fife on the long march from Saratoga to Valley Forge. A few died on the way, and I thought at times I might not make it. When I felt that way, I saw most could barely summon strength to take each step. They held up their collars to fight off the bitter cold.

I decided more was expected of me. I held my hand to my mouth and blew to unfreeze my lips, which I wet with my tongue. I pulled out my fife and with a lot of effort played a happy marching tune.

At Valley Forge, three of the men said I saved their lives. They thought that "if that kid can play a lively tune at a time like this, an older man like me should have the strength to march."

Hannah looked at Samuel adoringly. "Benjamin was right, you were a hero."

"I suppose a hero can be an ordinary person just doing what he is supposed to do."

Benjamin packed a large sack for his trip to Fryeburg. He brought an axe, a hatchet, a knife, winter and summer clothes, and a good supply of dried food.

He arranged passage on a schooner at the Methuen dock and loaded a small canoe on board. From Saco, he voyaged four days up the Saco River in his canoe. The trip was challenging to one who had not had a lot of canoeing experience, especially on waters that were sometimes rapid and shallow, continually filled with rocks which presented small dangers. On the afternoon of the first day on the river, he saw rapids ahead and had to maneuver his boat to shore, so that he could ford past the falls. He observed a few settlers at a new village near the falls. He encountered falls each of the next two days and followed the same process.

Benjamin arrived at Fryeburg in late September and located Caleb Swan's house. There he learned James Swan had moved his family to Sudbury Canada, a small settlement begun just two years earlier. The land had been granted to a man from Sudbury, Massachusetts for his service against the French. Being so far north, the settlement thus gained its name. Caleb was very helpful.

"James said if the Barkers arrive; tell them Fryeburg was getting too crowded for me. He said he wanted to sail and explore a wider river before he was too old. At Sudbury Canada, the Androscoggin was ideal for him. He also wanted his sons to have an opportunity to own more land. It's about 30 miles to his new house. If you get an early start and walk quickly, you can make it in one day."

Benjamin arose early the next morning and set out north bearing a back-pack following a well-marked old Indian trail through the forest. Late the next evening, Benjamin arrived in Sudbury-Canada and was directed to James Swan's house, where James greeted him. "Are you one of Jonathan Barker's sons?"

"Yes sir, my name is Benjamin."

"Where are Jon and Jonathan?"

"Jon and Jesse will come next spring. I came early because my wife was pregnant when I left and I wanted to have a house built when she arrived."

"You will need help. Do you know my sons, Joseph Greeley and James, Junior?", nodding towards two rangy men standing beside him."

"Nice to meet you both. I heard all about you from Jon, back when he crewed with you on the schooner and on the Merrimac ferry. It would be great if you can help me."

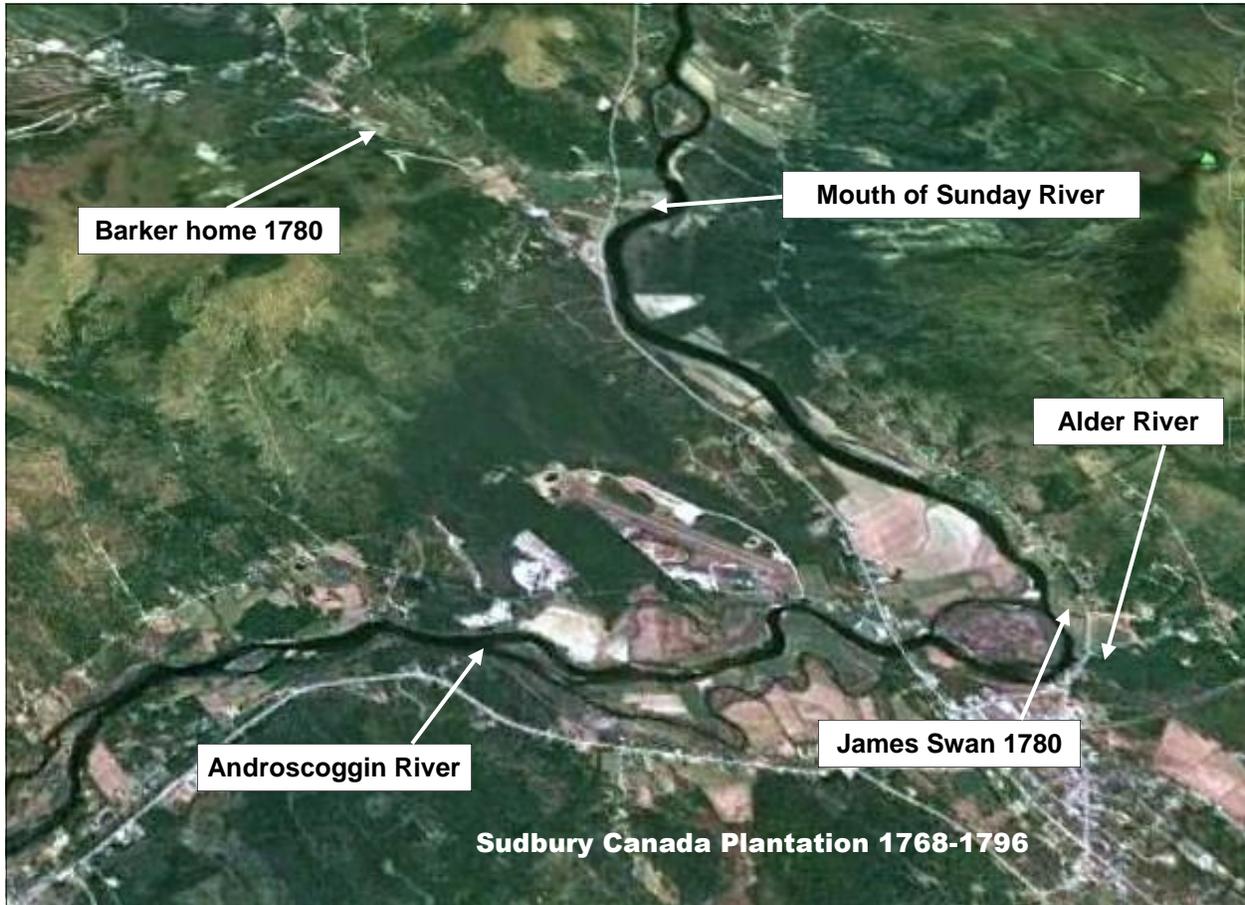
"Their sister is pledged to Jon, so they are obliged to help. I will find a spot for you to lay your mat for the night and tomorrow I will show you an unsettled area ideal for you and your brothers. I will take you there in the small sloop I built this summer. If you like the area, we can all start building right away."

The next morning, James, his two sons, and Benjamin loaded the tools and supplies they needed and sailed up the Androscoggin to its junction with an unnamed river which flowed south. They tied up the sloop and walked along its banks. James pointed ahead to a mountain on their left.

"We should look for a clearing at the base of that mountain and next to the river. The mountain will provide protection from the winter wind. You should be able to acquire a lot of land here at very little cost. It is at the outer edge of Sudbury Canada but has not been laid out or assigned. I believe the land is quite fertile and suitable for farming. If you decide to settle here, you can name them 'Barker River' and 'Barker Mountain.'

"Since you know this area quite well, I could do no better than to follow your advice, Mr. Swan. I am anxious to find a good spot and get started building a cabin."

## Maps of Barker Home Area



Top Sudbury Canada and Sunday River—Alder River area; above enlargement of area vicinity of the Barker's settlement. Google Earth images

At the time the Barkers arrived in Sudbury Canada plantation there were only a dozen homesteads in the settlement and only half of them were within the area covered by this photo map.

When they arrived at a clearing near the mountain, James appeared quite pleased. "I believe we have arrived at the new Barker property. Let's get started."

They set about cutting trees for the cabin. A one-room cabin went up for Benjamin and his family, then an extension was added for Jon and Jesse. By first snow, they were well prepared for winter and arrival of more of the Barkers in the spring. Benjamin missed Lydia very much and counted the days until she would arrive with their first child, born a month after Benjamin left Methuen. He was sad he had missed the first months of its life and tried to picture what he or she would look like when Lydia finally arrived.

Back in Methuen, Lydia was very busy with her infant son, whom she and Benjamin had agreed to name Elijah. She longed to be with Benjamin and kept noting to Jon and Jesse how mild the winter was, and that they should soon be able to travel.

In early March a full week of warm weather melted nearly all the snow. They began packing for their new home. They had not heard from Benjamin since he left, so they assumed they would be settling in Fryeburg, and much of what they needed was available there.

By mid-March they were on a schooner heading up the coast of Maine to the Saco River. They continued the journey on the river by canoe. Rowing was difficult, as the river current was hard against them, due to the melting snow upstream. At times, they wished they had come without the canoe, for movement by foot seemed faster than by the river.

At dusk of the second day of the river trip, they arrived at Steep Falls and noted a settlement on the west side of the River. As they pulled their canoe ashore, two settlers approached them, offering assistance. The settlers told them they were at Ossipee Plantation, named for the river that flowed into the Saco, just above the falls. This village would later be incorporated as Limington, and a smaller settlement on the east side would become the village of Standish. The travelers set up a camp for the night, saving the trek around the falls until morning.

At sunrise, they were able to catch trout, and cooked a tasty breakfast of it. They then cleared their camp and continued the journey. As they progressed inland on the Saco, the temperature dropped, and they encountered deeper snow. They were happy when they finally reached Fryeburg and Lydia excitedly looked for Benjamin.

They met Caleb and Dorothy Swan, who told them Benjamin had gone to Sudbury Canada, where James Swan had moved his family more than a year earlier. Dorothy helped Lydia and her six-month-old son to settle for the night, and Caleb helped Jon and Jesse. They were told the journey to Sudbury Canada would be a difficult two-day trek for Jon and Jesse in snowshoes.

There was still nearly a foot of snow on the ground so Dorothy strongly advised Lydia to stay with her for a few days. Jon and Jesse could borrow their sled to carry heavy cooking pails and other items they would need. Benjamin could bring it back and use it to bring his wife and son to Sudbury Canada. Lydia was disappointed at the delay, but accepted the plan.

Jon and Jesse started their 30-mile trek at dawn. Jon drew the heavy-laden sled most of the time, with short periods of assistance from Jesse. Jon's five-foot, ten-inch 175-pound frame was more suited to the task. Jesse was much smaller and could barely draw the sled twenty feet before having to rest. Jon lost patience with Jesse.

"We'll never make it in two days at this rate. You can fill your pack with as much as you can, and I will pull the sled with the rest."

"I only wanted to do my part, but I guess you are right," apologized Jesse.

At sundown, they found fallen branches for a fire and set up camp for the night. After eating nuts, cheese and corn meal, they collapsed on their mats and slept soundly until daybreak.

Another long day brought them at last to Sudbury Canada, where they soon found James Swan's house. They were too exhausted to travel the final two miles to the Barker cabin in the dark, so they stayed the night.

The next morning, Joseph Greeley Swan led them to Benjamin and the cabin he had helped him build. Benjamin was happy to see them, but his first thoughts were of his wife and baby.

"Where is Lydia and my baby? Are they all right? Didn't they come with you?"

Jesse understood his concern. "They are both fine. They are staying with Caleb and Dorothy Swan, waiting for you to get them. It would have been too much for them to make the trip in the snow without help. We borrowed this sled from Caleb, so you can return it to him."

Despite his six-month absence and all that had occurred during that time, Benjamin had no patience for a long and friendly reunion with his brothers. "I must get started immediately. I can't wait to see Lydia and my baby."

"Your son is six months old, a rather large baby at this point," offered Jesse.

Benjamin drew the empty sled at a rapid pace and didn't stop until he reached Caleb's house after midnight. He knocked, rousing most of the family. Lydia awoke as well, hoping that it would be Benjamin. As Caleb opened the door, she was peering from her room and rushed to Benjamin's arms as he appeared.

"She sobbed as she opened her heart to him. "Oh, Ben, this long separation has been so painful. Please don't ever let us be apart again." He brought his gear inside and into the room to see, for the first time, his six-month-old son, Elijah.

The next morning, Dorothy cooked a hearty breakfast for the Barkers, to send them on their way to their new home. Caleb invited them to stay until the snow melted completely, but they were anxious to settle for good. The Swan's gave them a small sled they could use to pull Elijah, for they had no children left to use it. Soon they were on their way, stopping to camp one night on the way.

The next few months were busy for the three Barker brothers. They found an area they could clear and prepare for planting of corn, tomatoes, potatoes, and beans. They ate a lot of fish they caught in the Barker and Androscoggin Rivers.

Joseph Greeley, Nancy, and ten-year-old Naamah Swan would visit them occasionally, bringing gifts from their father to help the new pioneers. Jon was becoming enamored of his intended bride, Nancy, as the teenager's body matured. She, in turn, still admired Jon's tall, manly appearance.

Just as their lives began to become more routine and comfortable, they were harshly disrupted by the totally unexpected.

The Barkers met some Indians who lived in the area and often seen canoeing on the Alder River. They were friendly and occasionally traded with the Barkers. However, on August 3rd, 1781, six Indians in war paint arrived at their door, demanding food, clothing and money. They carried tomahawks and made it clear they would be satisfied or they would kill.

Benjamin spoke, "We have very little, for we have just arrived from the south to settle. We have no money and just enough food to last until our first crops come in. Take what you want, but leave us in peace."

They accepted the offer and took all of the food they could find, as well as some boots and shirts. They asked, "Where you hide rum?"

Benjamin told them that they did not drink rum, so had none. The Indians left but warned Jesse and Benjamin to stay in house all this day, or be killed."

They huddled together in the house for several hours, to settle their nerves and be sure the Indians were out of sight.

A few days later, James Swan arrived to hear their story and to tell them what had happened in Sudbury Canada, which was much worse.

“The raiding Indians came from Quebec at the orders of the English troops who still held that territory. Their mission was to collect skins, whiskey, and food, as well as scalps and captives, for which the English would pay them. They killed and scalped your cousin, James Pettengill of Methuen and Peter Poor of Andover, and another. Joseph Greeley and another settler buried them. They captured Jonathan Clark and Nathaniel Segar and took them back to Canada, even though one of the Indians, Tomhegan, knew Segar and had even stayed at his house.”

James also asked Benjamin to accompany him and help build two garrison houses and fort to defend against any additional attacks. James served four days at the fort and Benjamin six and one-half days.

The next week, James received orders from the selectmen at Fryeburg to serve in a small detachment under Lieutenant Nathaniel Hutchings, to cruise the Androscoggin and guard against incursions by Indians from Canada. He served three months. Then the group disbanded, since there had been no new threats.

As James Swan completed his first service, word came of Washington’s defeat of British General Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, on Chesapeake Bay, with the help of the French fleet under Count de Grasse in October 1781. Victory now appeared inevitable, yet skirmishes continued throughout the colonies. Thus, the Fryeburg selectmen decided that service on the Androscoggin should continue until the war was finally finished. James Swan was called on again in July of 1782 until Nov. 21, 1782 for the same service.

By mid-December, word came of a preliminary peace treaty signed in Paris to end the war. All British troops would soon leave America. An air of jubilation flowed through the Sudbury Canada area.

On June 17, 1782, Lydia gave birth to a second son they named for Benjamin’s brother, Samuel. This was the first settler’s child born in what would a few years later become the town of Newry. He was born one month before the first white child, Peregrine Dustin, was born in Sudbury Canada.

One by one, the brothers began to buy livestock from residents of Sudbury Canada or Fryeburg. In the spring of 1782 they expanded their planting fields, so they could become self-sufficient with that fall’s harvest.

One day, as Jon was fishing on the Alder River, three local Indians approached him. Jon had seen them before and knew that they meant no harm to him. One of them had seen Jon wrestle on occasion with Benjamin, and they soon made it clear to Jon that they also wanted to wrestle him.

The smallest approached Jon and he quickly swung him over his thigh and laid him flat on his back. The next approached Jon and this one struggled a bit but also lost quickly. Then, the third approached. He was about as big as Jon. The two struggled for several minutes, but finally, Jon was able to throw him to the ground on his back.

The Indian jumped up, saying, “You all mattahondou” which means “you all devil.” Jon shook hands with all three of the Abenaki Indians and they made the peace sign to him.

### **The Bethel Journals**

**This chapter from Howard Kaepplein’s manuscript “The Andover Connection” is published here with his permission.**

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