



# Researching Early Falmouth

## *Two Historic Sites on the Foreside (1633-1713)*

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Falmouth Heritage Museum

Historical photographs, unless otherwise attributed,  
were obtained through the Wikimedia Commons



# Queries from the Community

We responded to 40 requests last year

- Some are easy
- Many are challenging
- A few are very difficult
- Research brick walls encountered most often south of Lunt and Depot Roads

Two cases from 2021

- Portland Country Club: Where was Fort New Casco?
- Mackworth Island: What is the island's history?



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# Researching Ancient Falmouth

Research almost always begins with William Willis' *The History of Portland from its First Settlement*

- Fundamental reference for history of Ancient Falmouth
- Well-researched, well-sourced, well-written

After Willis, the trail becomes harder to follow

- Some resources lost or difficult to access

Recently digitized resources are opening windows into the past



*William Willis (1794-1870)*  
*Lawyer, Politician, Historian, Author*

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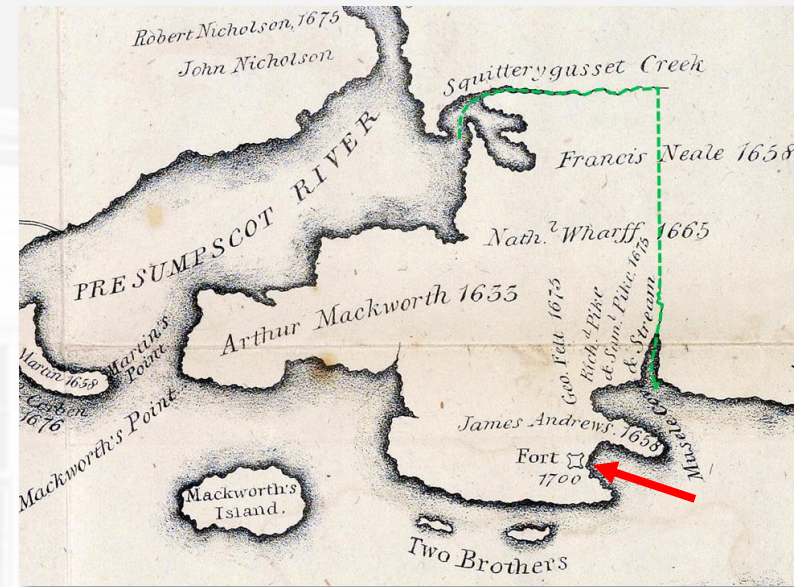


# Arthur Mackworth

## Falmouth's first settler

- At Mackworth Point ca. 1633, then on Mackworth Island
- Received grant for 500 acres in 1635
  - More like 1,300 acres
  - Bounds included everything south of the Fire Station and Mill Creek Pump House
- Died ca. 1657
- Widow made grants to children (Neale, Wharff, Felt, Andrews)

Then war came to Falmouth



*Willis' Falmouth 1633-1690  
Showing Mackworth Grant*

Nothing on this map is exact!

Image: Osher Map Library



# Falmouth's Violent Past

Ancient Falmouth abandoned, repeatedly

Suffered terribly over four decades

1675-1678 King Philips War

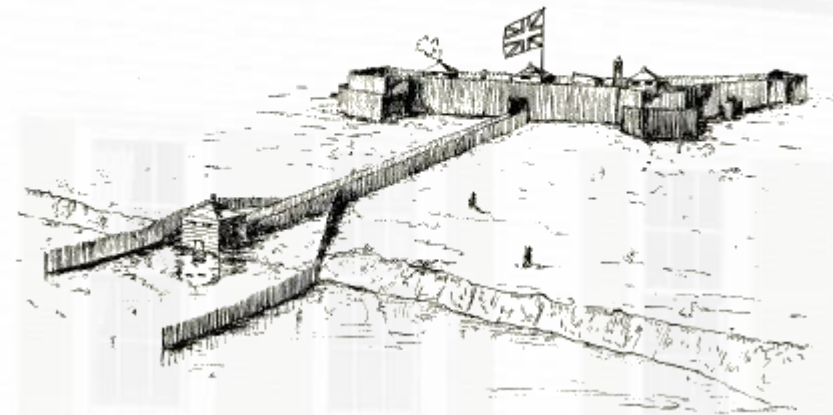
1688-1697 King William's War

1702-1713 Queen Anne's War

Settlers fled south for safety

Buildings destroyed

Town reestablished in 1718



*Fort New Casco on Falmouth Foreside  
(1700-1716)*

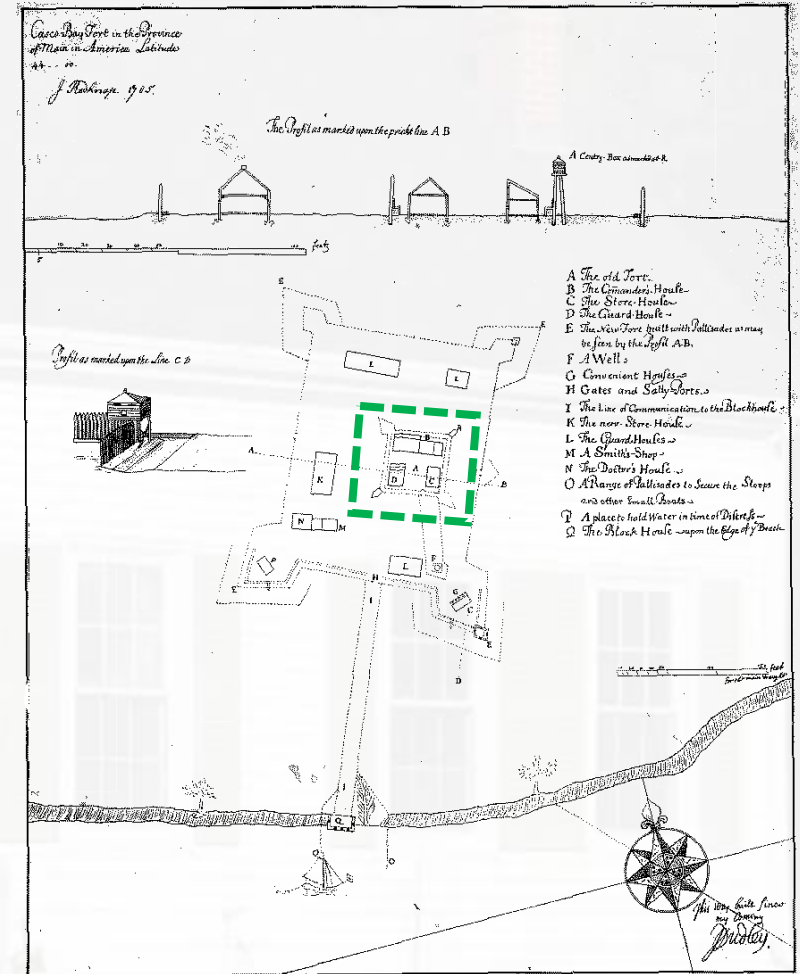


# Fort New Casco

Built by Col. Romer in 1700

- 70 square foot palisade
- Bastions at NW and SE corners
- Raised sentry boxes at NE and SW
- Commandant's quarters, guardhouse & storehouse
- Garrison of 36 men commanded by Maj. March
- Original fort outlined in green

Became the central point of defense for all settlements on Casco Bay



Capt. John Redknapp's Map (1705)



# War Comes to New Casco

## Queen Anne's War erupts in August 1703

- “Whole eastern country was in a conflagration, no house standing nor garrison unattacked.”
- English settlers took refuge in fort
- French laid siege to fort
- Siege relieved by arrival of armed ketch
- Garrison remained while families evacuated
- Fort expanded in 1705
- Treaty of Portsmouth signed in 1713
- Fort demolished in 1716 and settlers began returning to “Old Casco” (Portland’s Old Port)



*Carte du Canada ou de la Nouvelle France  
et des decouvertes qui y ont été faites (1718)*

Image: Library of Congress



# Where Was Fort New Casco?

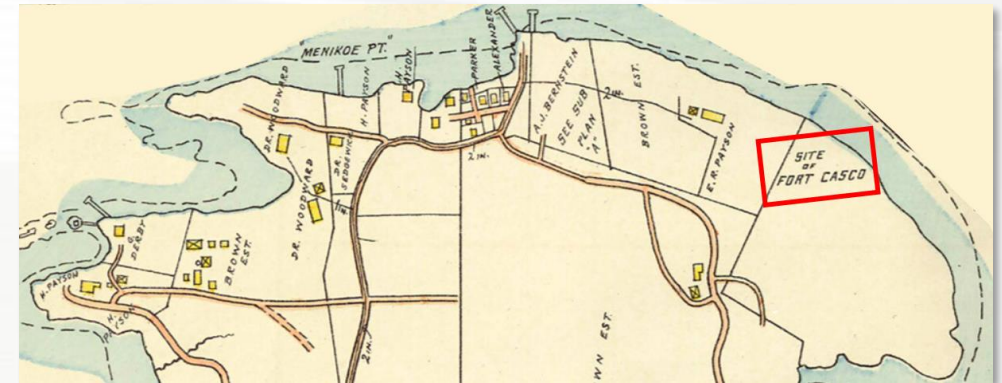
An abundance of “authoritative” sources

- Willis, historical societies, maps galore
- All agree it was near the PCC on the former Brown estate
- Locations are all over the place

1705 Plan of fort is most authoritative

- Prepared by a skilled military engineer
- Dimensions and directions should be accurate

19<sup>th</sup> century maps & charts



*Richards Atlas of the City of Portland 1914  
Part of Falmouth Foreside (Plate 21)*

Image: Portland Public Library

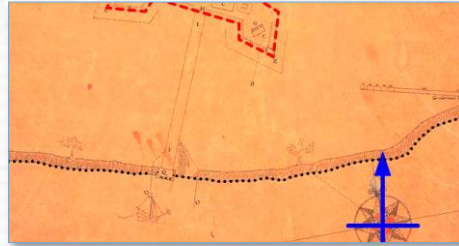




# The Answer

## A: Based on Site Plan

Located on private land near golf course between holes 16 & 17



*Redknapp Corrected for True North*



*Overlaid on Town Plat*



*Google Maps*

## B: Based on Old Maps

700 feet to east of "A"

## 300-yard stretch along shore

Both are consistent with contemporary descriptions



*Image: Portland Country Club*



# Mackworth Island

First step is to build the “skeleton”

- Family history: Family tree
- Property history: Chain of deeds

Deeds for Falmouth are in two counties

- 1635-1760 York County
- 1769-present Cumberland County

Most deeds have been preserved and are accessible

- Unlike many town and some probate records

Except for York County Volumes 20-36 (1737-1760)



*Mackworth Island*



# The Black Hole of York Deeds

## York Deeds Vol 1-19

- Published and downloadable from [Archive.org](https://archive.org)
- Searchable at [AmericanAncestors.org](https://www.americanancestors.org)

## York Deeds Vol 20-36

- Accessible ~~only~~ at Registry of Deeds in Alfred
- Digitized microfilm now accessible at [familysearch.org](https://familysearch.org)

## Records of the Falmouth Proprietors

- Accessible ~~only~~ at Registry of Deeds in Portland
- Digitized transcript now accessible at [Archive.org](https://archive.org)

Brick walls are meant to be broken!



*York Deeds  
Vols. 1-19*



# Researching Mackworth Land

Lesson in past presentations

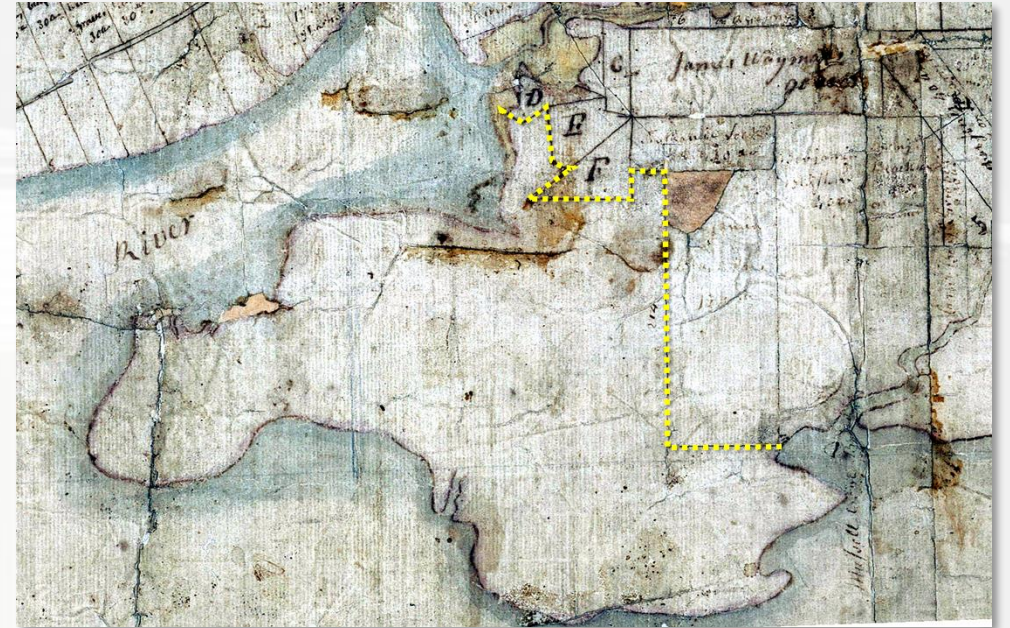
- Use the 1732 Proprietors Map as a guide to early Falmouth deeds

Doesn't work for Mackworth tract

- Yellow line shows Mackworth boundary
- Most of tract viewed as “Old Proprietor”

Picked up the trail in Cumberland County deeds after 1760

- Island had been divided into four parts
- Confusing deeds misled researchers



*Proprietors Map for the Flats and South Foreside*



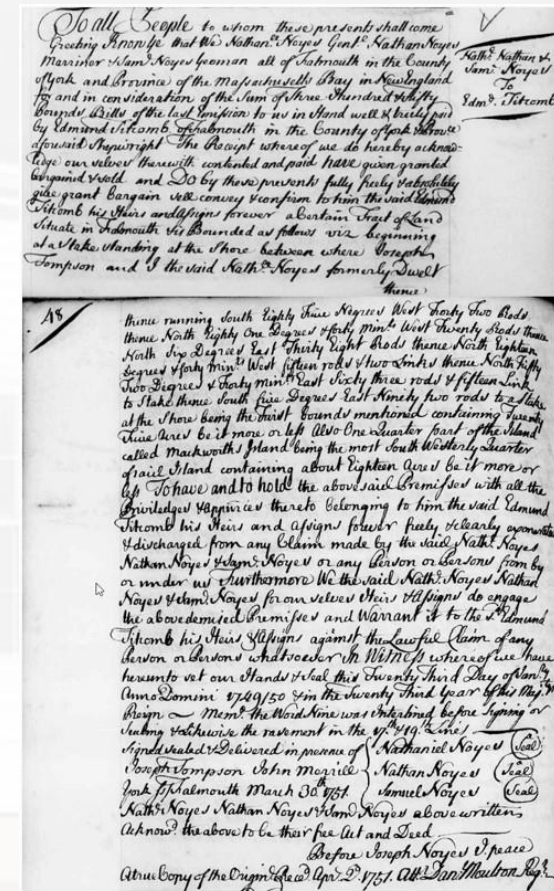
# Untangling the Chain

## Followed the trail back into York Deeds

- One deed in 1765 referred to a sale in 1751
- Armed with the year and name of the seller, found the date of the deed in the index
- Found the actual deed

## Continued following the chain back to 1742

- The Mackworths were dead
- A descendant came forward
- She sold the residual estate to a lawyer
- It was resold to Nathaniel Noyes
- Noyes carved up the island and sold the parts



York Deed for Mackworth Island



# The Peculiar History of Mackworth Is.

York Deeds put us back on the correct trail

Island owned by farmers until 1807

Owned by landlords for the next 77 years

- Including James Deering, a bank, and a developer
- Three months as US Army Camp Berry in 1863

James Baxter purchased the island in 1884

Gov. Percival Baxter donated the island to the state in 1943



*Baxter Summer Home*



# Conclusions

Reconstructing the narrative for property in Colonial Falmouth is challenging but can be done

Newly digitized records open a window to the past

- Broad range of source materials helped find the answer to “Where was Fort Casco”
- Non-governmental copies of government records broke through brick walls to reconstruct the story of Mackworth Island

Your town historical society is ready to help you solve your mysteries!



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