

10,000 BC



The area around the Sudbury River was likely settled shortly after the end of the last Ice Age. The area was mostly covered with tundra with copses of pine, birch and alder. Large animals such as woolly mammoths and mastodons roamed the region.

Population: 20-50

The people who lived here were hunter gatherers who developed highly sophisticated stone tools needed for hunting large game. The earliest stone tools found in Sudbury date to around 9,000 BP with earlier material found just north of town along the Sudbury River.



A Paeloindian spear head, circa 8,500 - 9,000 BC found along the Sudbury River in Concord.

The culture of the inhabitants of Sudbury changed quickly in several thousand years as the environment continued to change to become more like it is today. The following ten thousand years saw a gradual evolution of culture until around 500 BC when the Woodland culture developed.



Two Early Archaic points circa 10000 BP probably found near the Sudbury River. From the Harry Rice collection, these points are the oldest items in the Society's collections.

1500 AD



Population: 100-200

By 1500, Sudbury was home to a sizable population of Native Americans as evidenced by the numerous hearths found by 19th century farmers. Part of the Nipmuc culture, settlements were located throughout the area with more located near the base of hills and along the riverways.

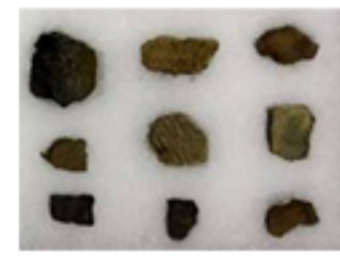
Settlements contained small and large clusters of wigwams and long houses. The area was criss-crossed by a well-developed system of trails. The Nipmuc practiced sophisticated agriculture and heavily utilized the waterways for fish and shellfish.



Stone points from 1200-1500 in the Harry Rice Collection



Stone axes from 1200-1500 in the Harry Rice Collection



Pottery fragments from 1200-1500 in the Harry Rice Collection

The material culture of the Nipmuc embraced a wide variety of materials but today it's mostly known from the stone tools and pottery fragments that survive.



Sudbury's landscape is full of reminders of its indigenous past. There are stone mortars such as the one shown on the left and stone ceremonial structures such as the stone turtle shown on the right.



1639



Population: 60-80

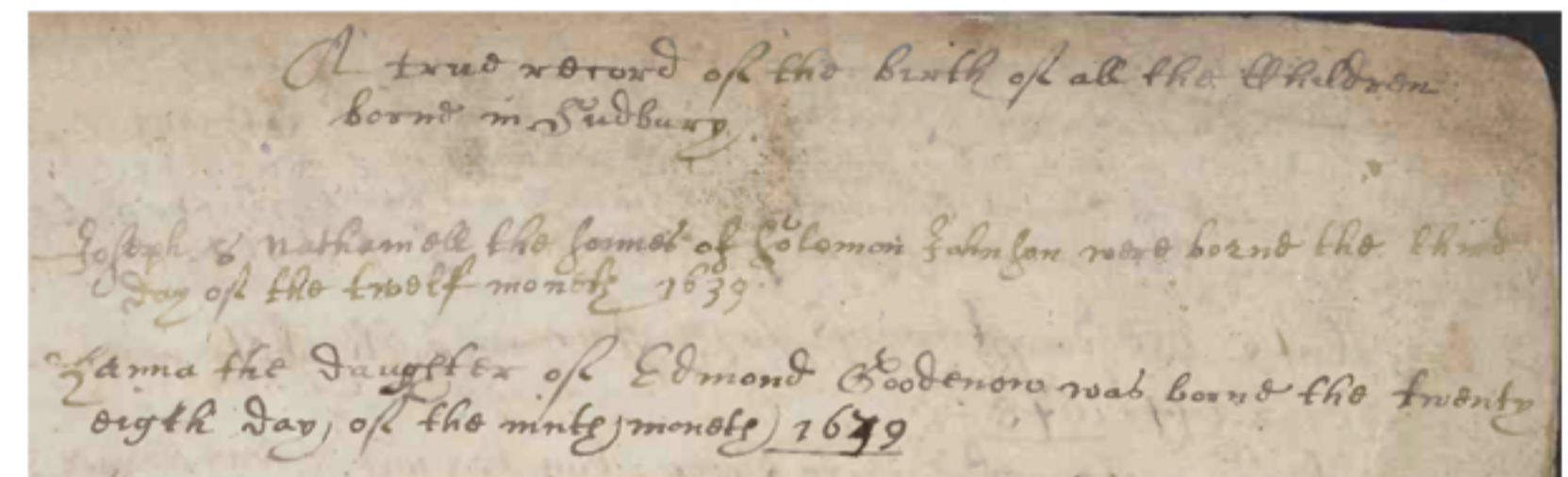
In 1638 Peter Noyes and 16 families settled in Sudbury purchasing the land from the small group of Native Americans that had survived the decimation of the native population by European diseases. In 1639 the town was incorporated.



A reconstruction at Plimouth Plantation shows a street similar to the first street in Sudbury

The original settlement was clustered on two streets on the east side of the river with farmland extending to the west. By 1646 settlement extended to the west side of the river. The first few years were difficult as the settlers cleared land, built houses and planted crops. The settlers practiced subsistence farming growing European vegetables and herbs near the house and native plants in the fields by the river.

The settlers were mostly families. A few had servants. Many had little experience farming. Some had skills in milling and smithing. The town began growing almost as soon as the settlers arrived with two births recorded in 1639.



A page from the town's first record book

Houses were small with one room and a loft. Simply furnished, six to eight people lived in them. With a central fireplace and no glass in the small windows, winters were difficult. Within ten years, some of the settlers began expanding their homes adding a full second story, larger fireplaces and glazed windows. A few families had even amassed enough money to purchase fine furnishings.



A rare surviving example of high-style furniture, the Parmenter Cupboard made between 1640 and 1650 would have been the dominant furnishing in a Sudbury home (Wadsworth Athenaeum)

The church was integral to the settlers' life with mandatory all-day services on Sundays (even non church members had to attend services). Piety was common though not universal. The first town meetinghouse, where services were held, was built between 1640 and 1642.

The town meetinghouse also served as the focus for governing the town through town meeting. Each landholder had to attend town meeting, serve as town officers and contribute labor to town projects. Over 150 town meetings were held in the first ten years. Sudbury's town meeting is believed to be the oldest continuously operating direct democracy in the world.



The communion table perhaps made for the Second Meeting House (1655) is the oldest surviving piece of ecclesiastical furniture in America (Wadsworth Athenaeum)

