

More on Gilmanton... The first people to set foot on the soil of this central portion of New Hampshire were the aboriginal Native Americans who lived a migrant life following seasonal opportunities to capture fish and animals which were the major part of their diet. The western edge of Gilmanton at the Winnepesaukee River contains a site that was popular for thousands of years for locating weirs to catch fish as they migrated between the ocean and lakes. Runnells in his "History of Sanbornton" also recalls the story of a battle which was once waged on present day Mohawk Island between the warring Pequawkets and Mohawks.

Gilmanton, first known as "Gilmantown", was incorporated in on May 20, 1727, when Lieutenant Governor John Wentworth granted a charter for the Town of Gilmantown to 144 individuals, of whom 24 bore the name of Gilman. Other families related to the Gilmans also received grants in the new town, including Dudleys, Leavitts, Folsoms and Coffins. The same year, the Lieutenant Governor five other townships charters to vast areas of uninhabited territory in central New Hampshire east of the Merrimack and Winnepesaukee rivers.

The original town was larger than it is now, containing 86,500 acres or 135 square miles making it the second-largest town in the state and the 30th largest city in the United States according to the 1790 US Census. At that time, the town was comprised of villages and parishes including Belmont, Gunstock Parish (Gilford), Hurricane, Tioga, Factory Village and Lakeport. A parish first called "Averytown", the site of an unprofitable iron-mining enterprise, is still known as Gilmanton Iron Works.

Although granted in 1727 most of this vast territory remained uninhabited other than by the sparse migrant Native American populations or by the few brave individuals who attempted to explore the territory. Years of tension between the settlers of the coastal communities and the Native Americans had come about as the result of atrocities carried out by both parties. With the culmination of the French and Indian War in 1760 the Native American population withdrew into Canada and left vast areas safe for settlement by the English. Thus in 1761 preparations were made to settle the town and in December of that year the first settler arrived in Gilmantown.

Politically the original Gilmantown underwent two divisions. First Gilford and parts of Laconia seceded in 1812, Gilford to become a separate town, and the remainder of the town was split into today's Belmont and Gilmanton in 1859.

This Belmont division was not at the request of the residents but rather appears to have come about as the result of political maneuvers in the state legislature. According to the legislative act a new town by the name of Gilmanton was created and the remaining portion was renamed Upper Gilmanton. Because of the wording of the act Upper Gilmanton was accorded the original incorporation date and all town records dating to 1727. In 1869 the Upper Gilmanton town meeting adopted an article to change that town's name to Belmont which became effective July 5th, 1869. The section to become Belmont is assumed to have been settled after 1765 when that portion of the Town was surveyed and divided in one hundred acre lots. The two most likely parts of that area to receive the first settlers were the area near the Winnepesaukee River in the western part of the town and along the Province Road (Route 107) which was surveyed in 1770 and built shortly thereafter. It is safe to say that Belmont was settled before the American Revolution, but the number of inhabitants were few. In the 1780's and 90's many of the current roadways in the town were laid out to connect to the scattered farms that had been established by then. *Postcard History Series, Belmont, Diana M. Marden*