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JOHN RUSSELL

By WILLIAM A. WING

PAPER READ AT MEETING OF THE
OLD DARTMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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OLD DARTMOUTH HISTORICAL SKETCHES

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In the Series of Sketches
of New Bedford's Early History

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JOHN RUSSELL

OLD DARTMOUTH met with an irreparable loss at Christmas 1725 in the burning of the house of Thomas Hathaway, the Clerk of the Proprietors, and with it the destruction of their records. Thomas Hathaway, a staunch early Friend, did not believe in celebrating Christmas, so the fire could not be laid to the holiday festivities, but was one of the misfortunes that have raised havoc with the early records. The Town-Meeting records begin in 1673, the earlier ones are missing, and those following just after King Philip's War are tragically meagre.

Dartmouth was settled mostly by younger "second generation" folk, who had found the parent-towns of Duxbury, and Portsmouth, Rhode Island, becoming too crowded for a future. John Russell was one of the mature early settlers, being about fifty-five, when he came permanently to Dartmouth, and remained here about thirty years until his death. John Russell lived entirely in the sixteen hundreds during the reigns of all the English Stuarts, except Queen Anne. They were — James I, Charles I, Charles II, James II, William and Mary — and he was probably anti-Stuart. However, they must have seemed only distant echos of royalty from that "time-dimmed far-away land called England."

There are not many descendants now who bear the name Russell, once so frequent and of importance here. But there are many descendants, for instance all the "Howland Heirs" so-called, and there are various descendants, members of this Society. Our President — Mr. Crapo is one, and he is sitting in his Ancestor John Russell's chair.

I remember my grandfather Howland, who remembered his Grandfather Howland, who remembered his Grandfather John Russell — one of the Russell Twins — and namesake and grandson of John Russell Senior. So only three lives span the memories from him, a space of over three hundred years. Never-the-

less the getting together the material for this short study of John Russell has been somewhat like "gathering up the fragments."

There were no less than six John Russells who were Pioneers in what is now Massachusetts, if we accept the usual date of prior to 1650 for a Pioneer. From this somewhat confusing group our own John Russell emerges in Plymouth at "Rexham," that is Marshfield, at about 1640. There were born to him and his goodwife Dorothy, three sons, John, Jonathan, and Joseph.

To Marshfield, at about this same time as John Russell's appearance there, came the Rev. Richard Blynman and his parish-group from the borders of Wales. He and some of his flock shortly departed for Gloucester at Cape Ann where he established his church. John Russell and his wife Dorothy may have come with them, though there is no proof either way. As Monmouth is in that vicinity, the continuous and die-hard legend that a Russell came to Dartmouth from there may have some vestige of truth to enlighten that myth, although an intensive search of English Records of that locality has remained unrewarded.

In 1642, John Russell was appointed Constable at Marshfield, an important office for that time and place. Shortly afterward he was made a freeman showing that he was approved religiously, civically, and financially in his community. One of the earliest places to establish a school was in Marshfield, and when its town-folk so resolved, among the subscribers for this desirable project was John Russell, who at that time had children of his own to attend the school. He held various town offices and was likewise a surveyor of highways which was to serve him well not only then, but later. He had early bought lands at Marshfield of Thomas Chillingworth, and was thereafter a considerable purchaser of real estate. In the old burying ground of Marshfield — near the Daniel Webster Farm — there is a small monument to the Early Settlers, on it are the names John and Dorothy Russell and, if you look off in the south-westerly direction you may vaguely see the locality of their early lands.

Quakerism, with its heavy penalties, reached Marshfield in 1657, and among those entering into it whole-heartedly were

Arthur Howland and his wife Margaret, their neighbors and friends. Although there is no record of John Russell's active interest and part in the attendant troubles, it may have had some influence on his coming here to Dartmouth later on. According to an ancient deposition he was upwards of fifty years, and was soon in civic documents to be called "Senior", showing his eldest son John had reached maturity. Land speculation was rife at that time, and the exodus to other localities was much in progress. The vision of future homes for himself and his own, and a wider and freer field undoubtedly were strong influences "for without vision the country perishes," though this may have been somewhat the vision brought of necessity.

A group of the few first-comers held in common a certain community land lay-out, on the east side of the Acushnet River about opposite what is now "Brooklawn Park." It had a Point stretching out into the River, on which was later the earliest burying-place and was watered by a goodly Brook. Not long after this purchase, John Russell sold his share to John Cooke who came to Dartmouth at that time. John Russell having bought the share of Myles Standish in "Ponagansett", and then calling himself "planter and freeman", he became in Dartmouth what might be termed a "favorite son," for he was the first to represent his township as Deputy to the old Colonial Government at Plymouth in 1665, and thereafter at divers times. This was then a responsibility of particular importance to his community. He made his journey on horse-back, horses were fairly plentiful in early Dartmouth, for it was primarily a place of pasturage. In fact the Indians thought there were too many for they complained that the horses of the "Englishmen" injured their belongings, and John Russell was one of those to settle the matter with apparent satisfaction. Well armed he rode along the then difficult "King's Highway" hardly more than a rough path, following the old Indian trails between Plymouth and Rhode Island passing through Dartmouth. If you rode toward Newport it was called the "Rhode Island Way" if toward Plymouth the "Plymouth Path" and at Acushnet was the "Parting Ways". The journey had its perils and pitfalls, but there were

companions enough, it being in its way a sort of pilgrimage to Plymouth. They travelled somewhat in groups, to their various destinations and missions, wary of some wayfarers and welcoming others. The Deputy must needs go, and the Custodians of those on trial, the Tax-Collectors with moneys gathered-in, the Jurymen, the partakers in the Court-Trials, also adventurers and hangers-on. Stopping-places were few and none too good, but they offered refreshment and much needed rest for "man and beast" in this early colonial-cavalcade. Thus our Deputy John Russell was serving and representing his new home township of Dartmouth in Plymouth Colony.



John Russell described himself as a "Planter" little knowing he was to come down to historic fame in planting his "orchards" at "Ponagansett." There was his homestead farm of 400 acres stretching from Clark's Cove to "Ponagansett" River, a lovely land with woods, lowlands and highlands, shores and streams. One in particular flowing into "Ponagansett River," has long been known as the "Old Fort Brook". Beside this stream he built his house, about 20 feet square with large stone chimney, and so-called "salt-box" ell at the north. This house was undoubtedly similar to the Thomas Taber House at Fairhaven a fragment of which still remains and belongs to this Society, and

we also have an interesting painting of Taber's, giving an excellent idea of a very early Dartmouth House. The entire sides of the Russell house were probably constructed of stones. Nearby were planted his apple orchards well fenced. Here he dwelt with his household in comparative peace and plenty. Such was the pattern of his Dartmouth scene when the Indian War with King Philip broke out in the summer of 1675.

One of the earliest attacks was upon Dartmouth. There had been sufficient time since the first onslaught at Swansea to strengthen his home place with a garrison and a strong stockade for the protection of the neighboring settlers. This little stronghold was known as the "Garrison at Russell's Orchards in 'Ponagansett." There of importance besides John Russell were Captain Samuel Eels of Hingham, in command, and Ralph Earle, a near neighbor of John Russell, when Captain Benjamin Church appeared upon the scene. John Russell in Marshfield days must have known Church who was born and bred and married in that part of Duxbury near Marshfield, so that this association must have given a somewhat familiar touch to later events. Little did they realize that their descendants would marry in later years.

Captain Daniel Henchman, from what is now Tiverton, R. I., in a letter dated July 31, 1675 to Governor Leverett of Massachusetts Bay writes, "On the 29th day landed here one hundred men to relieve Dartmouth being reported in some distress. At break Mr. Amie bro't word from Dartmouth that several parties of Indians with their arms to the number of four score gave themselves to the garrison for mercie, who set them in an island." This was good news and places conclusively the attack on Dartmouth as very late in July 1675. The "Island" is the so-called "Little Island" in the 'Ponagansett River near the Russell Garrison, and was John Russell's property, thus making an early "prison-camp" for the enemy and an ideal place for such, keeping them safe and in sight. There was, however, a sequel. Church, Eels, Earle, and we may be sure Russell, had promised the surrendered Indians not only mercy but security,

having treated with them through a friendly Indian. Imagine their dismay when it was found that the "powers higher up in Plymouth" refused to sanction the promises in spite of their pleadings. The "power higher up" is said to have been Josiah Winslow of Plymouth Colony, and its first native-born Governor. He was of Marshfield, and an old friend of John Russell and Benjamin Church who lost his friendship by their persistence. Governor Winslow had the old idea that a "good Indian was a dead Indian." The captive Indians were sent to Plymouth and were sold into slavery and sent from this country. Captain Church declared if this had not happened, and had they only been allowed to keep their promises faithfully with the surrendered, the War might probably have soon ended. So this unfortunate affair at "Russell's Garrison" was a crucial happening and the war dragged on for another year.

Captain Church came once more to "Russell's Garrison" at "Ponagansett" and lodged his men in a "thicket nearby", and found traces of Indians who had taken the apples from the "orchard", and had broken its "fences" and departed. Church and his party pursued and later with another detachment of his men captured a considerable number of hostile Indians. This exploit helped toward ending the War. So once again the "Russell Garrison" had a part of some importance in those "troublous times."

The war was over and there had been horrors enough in Dartmouth, but those quartered at "Russell's Garrison" had been comparatively safe even in the anxieties of a siege, for in a way they had been besieged. The Indians across "Ponagansett" River on the Earle homestead-lands had entrenched themselves in a sort of "dug out" fort on "Heathen-Neck," so-called for the "Heathen Redmen." Here, during the War, a tall Indian emerged from this shelter and made outrageously insulting gestures, which he is said to have learned from the Englishmen, thinking himself well out of gun range, but he was shot for his impudence. This old-time legend becomes a fact on finding among the listed possessions of one Abraham Sherman, of Dartmouth in 1773, nearly

a century later "A gun which killed an Indian across 'Ponagansett River from ye olde castle on Russell's land to Heathen Neck." John Sherman who did the shooting according to family tradition passed this gun on to his son who in turn gave it to his son John.

Now began the period of reconstruction, after an early Colonial War. In this John Russell was still active. The road between Rhode Island and Plymouth became more travelled than ever before, now the Indian horrors were ended, and John Russell again represented his township as Deputy. At Plymouth the head of King Philip was displayed on a pole, for more than a quarter-of-a-century, as a warning to would-be hostile Indians. John Russell must have seen it, perhaps under as dramatic conditions as did Patience Faunce who married Ephraim Kempton, and lived in Dartmouth to the ripe age of 105 years. She highly enjoyed regaling her descendants, "even unto the fourth and fifth generations," by telling them that when a young girl in Plymouth-Town she had seen King Philip's skull on a pole, and every spring a wren had nested in it and reared her young.

After the War, Plymouth ordered Dartmouth to "live compact together to defend themselves from assault of an enemy and better to attend public worship of God and ministry of the word of God carelessness to obtain and attend unto in fear may have been a provocation of God thus to chastise their contempts of his Gospel." This order was both geographically and religiously impossible, and was a direct blow at the Quaker influence in Dartmouth, which refused to be taxed to pay a "hireling minister" believing preaching should be "of the spirit only" while Plymouth's belief was more practically pecuniary. It was an excellent example of early religious politics. The Rev. Increase Mather highly approved of this un-Christian order, and sarcastically declared Dartmouth to be "without light" for he surely believed a minister was "worthy of his hire." He also deplored — "We are done with the Indians and now are molested by the Quakers" thus putting them both in the same category. Plymouth continued to order, admonish and threaten Dartmouth

in this respect, but practically no attention was paid to it. Can it be that the stubbornness that crops out in Dartmouth Town Meetings today is inherited?

At this time John Russell and John Smith were appointed to distribute the sum of 22 pounds "among those made destitute in Dartmouth by the late War." This was part of a much larger gift from "Irish Christians." The town of Dartmouth's share of this remarkably generous charity was next to the largest — thus gauging our necessities.

John Russell must have been an old friend of John Smith who had married Deborah, a daughter of those active early Friends, Arthur and Margaret Howland of Marshfield. So to John Russell, Sr. it was natural and satisfactory that later two of his sons, John Russell, Jr. and Jonathan Russell should marry two of John Smith's daughters, Mebitable and Hasadyah.

Joseph Russell, the third son had his part in the War for in an "Indian Tryal" at Newport, concerning the killing of Zoeth Howland of Dartmouth at Howland's Ferry it was testified that "the Indian, Manasses, pulled Zoeth Howland out of the water and also shot at Joseph Russell." The "Garrison-House" at Russell's Orchard became again a homestead, and there lived this Joseph Russell and his wife Elizabeth, and there were born to them in 1679, not during the war as often related — the well-known "Russell Twins," our very own "Romulus and Remus" and founders of our own "Rome," for they with their descendants, and on the Russell lands, were to be the founders of New Bedford; and those who came later on to New Bedford and prospered owe a debt to the early Russell Family. John Russell, Sr. built himself a new home on a nearby hillside, to the eastward of his historic "orchard-garrison." Here in later years he and his good-wife, Dorothy, dwelt in peaceful security after their all-too-close contact with an Indian War. Here was held the first school in Dartmouth — with Daniel Shepherd, of Shepherd Plains as Schoolmaster. The Russells having been eager for schooling even in their early days at Marshfield. Likewise early town-meetings were also

held here. So this home became an early civic and educational center, helping in the reconstruction for peace, as the former home had offered protection in War. After the death of Dorothy Russell in 1687, and John Russell, Sr. in 1695, their "home dwelling House with land there unto" was given to their eldest-son John Russell, Jr., who outlived his father but a year, giving the place to his son John Russell.

Among the belongings of old John Russell were "books" — rare in those days in Dartmouth. His clothing of all sorts was valued at 9 pounds a considerable sum for that time. Then, classed together "an old lanthorn and brass warming-pan," — I like to think how the one lighted his home and the other warmed his bed. To his grandson and name-sake John Russell, one of the twin sons of Joseph he gives "50 acres of land at the age of 21," and eventually this was the land at Mishaum Point where he built his house. Among the John Russell, Sr. records there was frequent mention of what appeared to be "sloop" which has caused imaginative ideas about possible voyages. However careful study of writing and wording of original papers, proves "sloop" to be "sheep," of much less intriguing interest!

So John Russell, Senior, ended his last days in his "home dwelling-place" within sight of "Russell's Orchards" and his "Garrison-House" by the "old-fort-stream" flowing into "Ponogansett" River with "Little Island" and "Heathen Neck" across, all reminders of the tragic time when he had helped to save Dartmouth from destruction. It is pleasant to know that in these changing times, the site of "Russell-Garrison" and the later homestead and the house at Mishaum are still in the possession of Russell Descendants.

Captain John Smith of Virginia who came to these very shores and mapped them — in his "Decription of New England," in 1616, wrote, "Who can desire more content than to tread that ground he hath purchased by the hazard of his life? What to such a mind can be more pleasant than the planting and building a foundation for his posterity wheresoever on this rude earth by God's blessing and his own endurance?"

Surely these ideals were fulfilled by John Russell.



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