

THE BENNETTS

of

SAUGUS, LYNN AND GROTON

*Presented by Mr. Frank P. Bennett
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THE OLD BENNETT HOUSE, SAUGUS, MASS.

Built by Samuel Bennett, or one of his sons, soon after 1636

MY great-great-grandfather, Moses Bennett of Groton, who bought a farm in that town, June 14, 1718, and married August 11, 1719, the daughter of James Blanchard of Dunstable is the pivot upon which a multitude of genealogical researches turn throughout the United States. I used the present tense advisedly, because although he is dead so far as the payment of poll taxes and other civic duties are concerned, he is yet very much alive in the genealogical researches alluded to, and I frequently receive inquiries from his widely separated descendants who differ somewhat as to his antecedents. My own theory has been that he was the great-grandson of Samuel Bennett of Saugus and Lynn, and while others differ with me in opinion, yet a variety of correspondence which comes to hand from time to time, appears to confirm my theory.

Samuel Bennett, whose active participation in the early affairs of Saugus and Lynn, is known to you all, came over in the ship James in 1635, when 24 years of age. The house which still exists on Howard Street, Saugus, near where I reside, and which is one of the best preserved specimens of colonial architecture in New England, was built either by Samuel Bennett or one of his two sons, and although it is frequently referred to as the Boardman House, yet its early connection with the history of Lynn, Saugus and Boston would be better emphasized if it were designated "The Bennett House."

The oldest son of Samuel Bennett, of Saugus, namely Samuel Bennett, Jr., whose marriage to the daughter of William Hargrave, of Horsey-Down, England, was the cause of the oft-quoted instrument of settlement by his

father recorded in Suffolk County Deeds, Boston, IV: 328, is the one who I theorize subsequently removed to Groton, Mass. The second and third sons, Elisha and John, were both mariners. John Bennett had a wife, Susanna, in 1673, but before 1677 he married Aphra, widow of Jonathan Adams, who had a son John Adams, born in 1672, and a daughter, Sarah Bennett, born in 1677. John Bennett had trouble in court with Samuel Adams of Chelmsford. He was in 1678, "shortly to go on a voyage." Captain Elisha Bennett, the second son of the original Samuel, made his will April 8, 1726, and the same was proved May 30, 1726. In his will he is described as of Rumney Marsh, and the will mentions his wife, Dorothy and children, John, Ellis and Sarah, who had grown and settled in life. The son Ellis was a mariner, and resided in Boston. The will also mentions a grandson, John Bennett at New York.

Samuel Bennett, Jr., migrated from Saugus in the latter half of the seventeenth century, but Captain Elisha Bennett, Mariner, is believed to have still lived in the old house which was then in that part of Boston called Rumney Marsh, now Chelsea, until at least the first half of the eighteenth century, as his will is recorded May 30, 1726, as already stated.

The families who remain for generations in the same community are either too prosperous to be attracted by a change or too unenterprising and thriftless to move. The Bennett families who appear early and often and in many different localities in the early history of the American colonies, came generally between these two extremes. The little warship "Massachusetts," which was one of the earliest naval efforts of these colonies, was commanded at the Siege of Louisburg by Captain Moses Bennett, and his

autograph appears among the archives at the State House in Boston, appended to the pay-rolls of that expedition. The first news of the fall of the great and strong fortress of Louisburg, which for thirty years the French had been building at the front of Cape Breton Island, was brought to Boston by Captain Bennett at daybreak on Tuesday, July 3, 1745. Never was there such rejoicing—bells ringing; cannon thundering at Castle William at the north and south batteries; bon-fires on the common; tents spread; casks of wine tapped; at night, candles in every window and rockets streaming up the sky.

Governor Richard Bennett of Virginia, born 1606, died 1676, was a member of the House of Burgesses in 1629; in the King's Council, 1642 to 1660; Governor, 1652 to 1655; Commissioner to England, 1657; made the General of the Virginia forces, 1662 to 1672. There were Bennetts from Gowanus, New York, in the war with the Indians in 1643. Samuel Bennett of East Greenwich and Coventry, Rhode Island, was a lieutenant in 1690 and a deputy the same year.

I am not going to repeat the many interesting facts respecting the life of Samuel Bennett in Lynn and Saugus, with which you are thoroughly familiar. He built the first iron works in the Western Hemisphere at Saugus, not as owner, but as master mechanic; he did the teaming for them after they were completed, and he put them into bankruptcy when they ceased to be successful. He also owned and operated one of the oldest mill privileges upon Strawberry Brook, and he became as early as 1640 one of the most enterprising citizens of this section of Massachusetts Bay Colony. The story that he moved into Boston because he was fined for

sleeping in church in Lynn, is not necessary for the purposes of this paper. His homestead was in that part of ancient Lynn or Saugus, which, about 1660, by the perfecting of the town bounds came into Boston, which then embraced ancient Chelsea, but which after the organization of the present town of Saugus was set off to Saugus. The ancient house on or near the site of the first house still stands, as already explained. Samuel Bennett was styled "carpenter," and in a deed in 1657 he conveyed "Rumly Hall" and eight acres of land to George Wallis, which estate is believed to have been nearer the present centre of Lynn than his home in what is now Oaklandvale, Saugus. In 1661, Samuel Bennett was one of the perambulators of the Town of Boston to inspect and determine the line between Lynn and Boston. He fulfilled the same offices in 1665, and as late as 1671. He had five children, Samuel, Elisha, John, and a fourth one, whose name I have not found, and a fifth, Lydia. The marriage settlement of his oldest son, Samuel, Jr., constitutes a well known historical document. Captain Elisha Bennett, mariner of Rumney Marsh, made his will April 9, 1726. The descendants of the younger children of Samuel Bennett appear in Boston as late as 1787, and their descendants are possibly readily traced by those who are interested.

I have said that there is some difference of opinion as to what became of Samuel Bennett, Jr., and that my own theory is that he removed to Groton, Mass., where there was an urgent demand for skilled mechanics in the latter part of the seventeenth century; and also considerable demand for men of courage to participate in the defense against the Indians. The name of Samuel Bennett appears frequently in the early history of Groton

in the latter part of the seventeenth century, sometimes in charge of parties engaged in the defense of the town. The difficulties in the way of exact genealogical knowledge in the latter part of the seventeenth and the earlier years of the eighteenth centuries were due not only to the defective character of the town and parish records, but also to the general indifference of most of the inhabitants of communities in which a Calvinistic religious element was dominant. The people cared not so much about a man's grandfather as whether he was one of God's "elect." I was much interested to read the following sentence even in a recent article by United States Senator Beveridge of Indiana, "You can open the Bible anywhere and be fascinated, except only and always its genealogies, which, as I have remarked before, are stupid and dull, whether they occur in the Bible or in history, or in a family tree." That remark of Senator Beveridge seems to be the theory of a man who lives in a section of the United States where great and exact interest is taken in the pedigrees of live stock. And most of us think the pedigrees of human beings are at least as interesting as the pedigrees of the domestic animals.

In any event, family records were very defective in the seventeenth century.

The heroic quality of the Pilgrim settlement at Plymouth and the stern religious character of the leaders of the early arrivals at Salem have idealized the nature of the entire immigration into the colonies which afterwards composed the state of Massachusetts. Samuel Bennett and probably a majority of the early settlers were purely commercial adventurers, looking for an opportunity to improve their material condition; but the

religious idea was dominant, and lent its color to all of the activities of the colonists. Hence, if the theocratic rulers cared little about genealogy, the rank and file of the inhabitants had no reason to differ from them in that direction.

However, from the date when my great-great-grandfather, Moses Bennett, bought land in Groton, June 14, 1718, and the next year was married to Anna Blanchard of Dunstable, the family record is clear and definite, and the descendants of Moses Bennett are so numerous, and many of them so much interested in genealogical researches, that they feel quite confident of establishing the antecedents of Moses Bennett.

The descendants of the Bennetts of Manchester, Mass., who are very numerous, are also interested in the same researches, and I have lately been in correspondence with several gentlemen of different branches of the Bennett family who have addressed inquiries to me upon these subjects. Another difficulty in tracing connections of the name of Bennett is that many of the families lack any common origin in recent years.

I once devoted a little time in the British Museum and elsewhere in England to inquiries upon this subject, and found that while the family name of the Earl of Tankerville is Bennett, and that he is one of the great noblemen of England descended in the maternal line from that Earl of Arlington, who was also named Bennett, and was one of the famous ministers of Chas. II; and while there are several important county families named Bennett, yet there were numerous dock laborers; a leading clock maker of London, and, in fact, persons of this surname in every walk of life. In fact, the name of Bennett is in England little less numerous than Smith, because it was

originally a given name derived from St. Benedict. There are ancient churches in England known as St. Benet's. The derivation of the name from Benedict is clearly established, and while at first a given name, it became eventually a surname. However, very many of the Bennetts who were among the earlier settlers of Massachusetts and Virginia were connected. And their descendants have migrated numerously throughout the United States. As I wrote the above sentence, having the Travellers' Railway Guide of the United States at hand, I opened it and found thirty-one railroad stations named Bennett in various parts of the United States. Moses Bennett of Groton, who took up a farm in that town upon his own account in 1718 and married Anna Blanchard August 11, 1719, was born in 1691, and I theorize that he was the great-grandson of the first Samuel Bennett of Lynn; but this theory is tentative, and may be disproved by the active researches of the number of intelligent descendants, who are now making inquiries upon this subject. Moses Bennett had ten children all enjoying good old Biblical names as follows: Abygail, or Abiah, Stephen, Moses, David, Eunice, Jonathan, James, Anna, Thomas and Aaron. The name of the ninth child, Thomas, who was my great-grandfather, appears on a muster roll dated Boston, February 5th, 1759, of a company of foot in his Majesty's service under Captain Asa Whitcomb in Colonel Jonathan Bagley's Regiment, raised by the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Thomas also marched on the alarm from Lexington, April 19th, and enlisted April 26th, 1775, in the eight months' regiments, taking part at Bunker Hill and the Siege of Boston, but was disabled later, and when he died, was reported as "Lately deceased occasioned by ye hardships and difficulties he underwent in ye late expedition

under Capt. Tyng, being taken sick and dieing at Charlestown." It used to be a family tradition that Thomas was hoeing in the field when the news came of the alarm at Lexington, and that he dropped his hoe where he was at work, and responded to the alarm. So many men are reported as having dropped their hoes in order to respond to the alarm, that I have been doubtful about this tradition, especially as April 19th was rather early for hoeing in this latitude.

The widow of Thomas, who was my great-grandmother, subsequently married Gershom Hobart, a lineal descendant of the early minister of Groton, and removed to Washington, Vermont, where she lived to be one hundred years of age or more. She is known to have been living in 1830, when my father was nineteen years of age, and was a prolific source of information, especially concerning the migration of the Whitcombs, Bennetts, and others from Groton to Vermont at the close of the eighteenth century.

On July 27, 1694, Gershom Hobart, the minister of Groton, with part of his family, was remarkably preserved from falling into the hands of the Indians when they made themselves the masters of his house, though they took two of the children, whereof the one was killed and the other sometime after, happily rescued out of his captivity. Gershom, Jr., son of the Rev. Mr. Hobart, whom Mather mentions as having been rescued from captivity, is said to have been carried to the east. The first information his friends received of him was in May following his captivity, at a fort a day's journey from Norridgewog, and his master's name was Nassacunbewit, the chief captain of the place. Both his master and mistress were kind to him and afterwards granted his ransom.

The widow of Thomas Bennett of Revolutionary fame, removed with her second husband, Gershom Hobart, to Washington, Vt. Her second child, Naomi, married June 6th, 1796, Gershom Hobart, Jr. My grandfather, Imlah Bennett, who was born at Shirley, Mass., October 5th, 1774, went with the Hobarts to Washington, Vt., and was present when that town was organized, March 1, 1792, being then only about seventeen years of age. The settlement of Washington, Vt. commenced in 1785, but the town was not organized until March 1st, 1792. Mr. Hobart's name did not appear in the town records until September 2nd, 1794, when it is recorded that Gershom Hobart, Jr., Joseph Trufant and others were enrolled "freemen."

There has been a theory that my great-great-grandfather, Moses Bennett, who, with Benjamin Bennett, appeared in Groton purchasing farms on the same day, June 14, 1718, were grandsons of the Moses Bennett of whom trace was lost in Manchester, Mass., in 1686. The Bennett family of Manchester descended from William Bennett, an original planter of the town, who died in 1683, leaving two sons, Moses and Aaron, then men grown; Moses was the oldest. Jane, the widow of William Bennett, in 1686 conveyed certain rights and lands to her sons, Moses and Aaron, and this is the last we hear of that particular Moses. The son Aaron had a family, and from him the later generations in Manchester and vicinity of the Bennett name descend, and the names of Aaron and Moses predominate among their descendants.

The theory that Moses Bennett of Groton came from Manchester instead of from Lynn is disputed by a statement in Hazen's History of Billerica, Massachusetts, where it is alleged that the father of Moses was probably

James, of Groton, who I argue was the grandson of the original Samuel of Lynn. Groton was incorporated in 1655, the coast of New England having become the property of King James 1st of England by the discoveries of John and Sebastian Cabot and Bartholomew Gosnold and other navigators. The king granted the territory to the Council of Plymouth, which in turn granted certain lands to the Governor and company of Massachusetts Bay in New England. It is very interesting to recall how title to these lands was acquired, in view of the fact that a great many people in the far West, who endeavor to acquire huge tracts of public land as squatters, assert that they are merely doing what our forefathers did in New England! Nothing could be farther from the truth. The Governor and company made grants of lands to companies and individuals for towns and plantations, usually annexing certain conditions to their grants, such as that a certain number of settlers or families should within a certain time build or settle upon the same; or, that the Gospel should be regularly preached, or a church gathered upon the granted premises. At the General Court held at Boston on the 23rd of May, 1655, Groton was thus authorized. Later the petitioners asked to be relieved from county taxes, for three years, on account of the remoteness of the place and slowness of the work. The word "remoteness" as applied to Groton, sounds interesting in these days when Denver, San Francisco, and even Manila, are not particularly remote; but while Groton was remote from the safer settlements upon the seaboard, it seems not to have been remote for a young man who was in love, as Moses, having promptly acquired title to his farm, soon began to go back and forth easily to Dunstable, which then comprised what is now Nashua, New Hampshire.

One of the periods when New Hampshire was part of Massachusetts was from 1699 to 1741. From Castle Hill in Saugus, one can readily look beyond both Groton and Nashua and see the Uncanoonuc Hills near Manchester, New Hampshire.

Hence the seventeenth century idea of remoteness to those of us who are accustomed to travel from New York to Chicago in eighteen hours, suggests that more material progress has been made in the last half century than in all the previous centuries of the world's written history. The early colonists in Massachusetts Bay were very like the Israelites 3,000 years earlier, in their appreciation of distances, and their means of locomotion, no less than in their constant reliance upon divine guidance. The story of the rebuilding of Groton after King Phillip's War, reads like Nehemiah's story in the Old Testament of the rebuilding of Jerusalem during the captivity.

King Phillip's War destroyed the first settlements at Groton and March 2, 1676, all the houses but four were burned. At the general town meeting of the inhabitants assembled at Concord, Mass., on the second of December, 1677, it was agreed that those assembled, "If the Providence of God prevented not by death or sickness, will go up in the spring following and begin to repair our habitations again, if God permitted; and for the true performance of this agreement, we do engage the forfeiture of our whole right in Groton unto those who do go up and carry on the work." I desire to interpolate here, that the first record made after the above, relates to the grant of lands of Gershom Hobart as minister, and is dated June 29, 1678. My reason for mentioning that matter is, that a descendant of the

same name, more than one hundred years later, married the widow of Thomas Bennett, as already mentioned, and through his connection further proof of the directness of my theory of the connection between the Groton and Saugus Bennetts has been established.

In 1689, King William's War, as it was called, occurred, and the frontier towns of New England were again the scene of barbarities and destruction. In arrangement of the garrisons in Groton, March 17, 1691, the name of Samuel Bennett and another Bennett, whose first name is not given, appears in the garrison of five men at Mr. Hezekiah Usher's farm. My theory is, that this was Samuel Bennett, Jr., formerly of Saugus and the grandfather of Moses Bennett of Groton. In the early annals of Lynn, it is stated that about this time and earlier, there was some immigration of mechanics to Groton. The history of Groton says the location of Mr. Usher's farm and the Bennetts of that period, is not known, but as the brook rising in Harvard and running into Spectacle Pond, is called "Bennett's Brook," it is probable that the Bennetts who preceded Moses lived in the vicinity of that brook. Cotton Mather refers to the remarkable preservation of Gershom Hobart, who was one of the eight sons of Rev. Peter Hobart, first minister of Hingham, Mass. From 1697 to 1702, peace prevailed at Groton. Then came the war with France, upon the accession of Queene Anne, and the frontier towns of Massachusetts were again exposed to tomahawks, scalping knives, fire and torture.

In 1675 there was a Moses Bennett in the company of Captain Samuel Brocklebank of Rowley, in the garrison at Marlboro, but he unquestionably came from Manchester, Mass. In the colonial records of King Phillip's War, occurred the names of Peter, Henry, John, Moses and William Bennett.

There was at last accounts eight epitaphs of Bennetts in Copps Hill Cemetery, Boston. The oldest was that of Sarah Bennit, wife of Samuel Bennit, formerly of Saugus. The inscription reads: "Here lyes ye body of Sarah Bennit, wife to Samuel Bennit, age 75 years, deceased January 18, 1682." The most recent epitaph under this name reads: "In memory of Mrs. Rachael Bennett, wife of Bezaleel Bennett, who died October 1, 1814, age 60."

Original documents concerning Moses Bennett, Jr., of Groton, and also of Thomas and his military and naval service, are in the Massachusetts archives, Boston. An order dated Boston, July 21, 1747, signed by Governor Shirley, directing Captain Moses Bennett to land the guns belonging to the Brig, Boston Pickett under his command, to secure the stores, haul up the vessels and discharge the crew excepting a boat-swain and boy to take care of the vessel, a muster roll dated, Boston, September 13, 1748, shows the muster roll of the ship "Massachusetts," commanded by Captain Moses Bennett, and June 20, 1749, the pilotage of the frigate "Massachusetts" in and out of New York, was certified by the autograph of Captain Moses Bennett. Lydia Adams, the widow of Thomas Bennett, who subsequently married Gershom Hobart and lived to the great age already mentioned, was born in Groton, August 4, 1743, the daughter of Methiboshbth Adams, and it is interesting to note how these old scriptural names were inevitable throughout that period.

By and by some person with greater facility in genealogical research and more time at his disposal than myself, will ascertain whether there was any cause for the co-incident arrival of several Bennetts at so many

different points in the colonies in the seventeenth century; that is, whether there was any common point of departure for most of them in England. In Munsell's Genealogical Index, references to Bennetts are made in 58 different books. There was a Henry Bennett in Ipswich, Massachusetts, as early as 1650, as a record of his marriage with Lydia Perkins of that town testifies. In 1654 he bought of Jonathan Wade, a farm of 200 acres, and besides his homestead, he held considerable land on Plum Island and elsewhere. The early settlers in Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania, the seat of subsequent bloody massacres by Indians, were Bennetts, and when the now thriving city of Wilkesbarre held but five women, three of them were of the name of Bennett.

William Bennett, one of the original planters of Manchester, Massachusetts, who died there in 1683, has already been alluded to.

Stephen B. Bennett of Pittston wrote a brief volume about the Pennsylvania Bennetts in 1899, and acknowledged that he formerly believed Samuel Bennett of Lynn to be an ancestor of the Bennetts who were drawn to the Wyoming lands by the Susquehanna Company. It was later discovered, however, that the other Samuel was the son of Edward, who, with his wife and four children, sailed from Weymouth, England, and settled at Weymouth, Mass., taking up, as he was entitled to, 36 acres of public land and being made Freeman in 1636.

Richard Bennett of Virginia, already alluded to, was the owner of immense tracts of land in Nansemond County, whence he came in 1621. His son, Richard of Greenburg Point, Anne Arundel County, Maryland, was a member of the Maryland Assembly in 1663. His son, the third Richard,

born in 1663, died in 1749, owned 1,300 slaves. The "Gentlemen's Magazine," in a notice of his death, says he was the richest man in the Colonies. His tomb is at Bennett Point, Queen Anne County, Maryland, with the Bennett Arms and a long inscription.

The consideration of the individuality of the modest settlers of those early days, gives a living touch to the pages of history. Samuel Bennett of Saugus bought a mill on Sagamore Hill in Lynn, Dec. 13, 1644, and upon the document regarding the purchase, which may be seen at the Salem Court House, is the autograph of Samuel Bennett. As we read of these commercial transactions, it is not easy to remember that the celebrated wedding of Winnupurkit, otherwise called George, Sachem of Saugus, to the daughter of Passaconaway, the great Penacook chieftain, at what is now Concord, New Hampshire, occurred in 1662, the theme of Whittier's poem "The Bridal of Penacook." Savage state and dignity were, therefore, dominant in Saugus and Lynn for many years after iron works and mills had begun to be established here by the sturdy settlers. I have stated that the Uncanoonuc Hills at Manchester, New Hampshire, can be seen from Castle Hill in Saugus. It was in the Uncanoonuc Falls, which drive the great Amoskeag Mills in Manchester, N. H., that the wife of Sachem George of Saugus, is said by a poetic fiction to have met her death in her attempt to return home to her husband.

James Gordon Bennett, the founder of the New York "Herald," a Scotchman born in Baffshire, once wrote: The Bennetts were a little band of freebooters, A. D. 896 in Saxony. I have no doubt they robbed and plundered a great deal. They migrated to France and settled on the Loire,

where they lived several hundred years. The family was Roman Catholic and later of the Church of England."

It is said that there are now more than one hundred clergymen of the established Church of England, named Bennett.

In 1619, at Yogubal, a south Irish seaport, Richard, Lord Boyle, caused repairs to be made to a certain chapel, time having caused it to fall into ruin. He carved recumbent stone effigies of a man and woman upon a tomb, which bears the inscription: "Here lyeth the bodies of Richard Bennett and Ellen Barry, his wife, the first founders of this chapel. It is for a reviving of their memory I have had their figures cut in stone."

Perhaps the oldest family of Bennetts in England, is at Pithouse, in Wilkshire. They have a coat-of-arms whose motto is "Benedictus Qui Toluit Coucere." "Blessed is He who Bears The Cross." No doubt there have been Bennetts in Germany, France and Ireland, as well as England and Scotland, but I still insist that their derivation from the given name of Benedict is so well established, that there are many of them whose relationship is not nearer than by the way of Adam. While history deals largely with kings and captains and governors, it is inspiring to take up, occasionally, the career of one of the millions who are marching in the ranks. We are told that the apparently careless flight of a bird across the sky leaves a permanent impression upon the world. How much more permanent must be the passage of even the most modest and inconspicuous human soul through life. Personally I have never had much time to devote to genealogy, but I make no apology for what little interest I have been able to manifest in the subject, as adding to the dignity and worth of the individual life.