

JOHN ELDERKIN,

**One of the Founders of Connecticut,**

And Some of His Descendants.



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John Elderkin, the only one of the name, so far as known, to come to this country, and the progenitor of all who bear the name here, was born in England about the year 1612. This is the date given in Dyer White Elderkin's "Genealogy of the Elderkin Family." Prof. Melville M. Bigelow, of Cambridge, Mass., one of his descendants, puts the date of his birth at 1616. In a deposition in court, in 1672, John Elderkin said he was 56 years old. This would seem to be conclusive as to the year of his birth. From whence in England he came is unknown, but Mr. Thomas Elderkin, of Manchester, Eng., under date of June 12th, 1894, says that the Elderkins came from the Fenns, Lincolnshire. The Elderkins are known in Northumberlandshire his-

tory, and were probably one of the English and Scottish border families.

John Elderkin came to New England, and is first heard of at Lynn, Mass., in 1637. Lynn was the third plantation of the Massachusetts colony, first settled in 1629. In 1638 twenty acres of land were allotted to John Elderkin. He was a carpenter and millwright, and in the volume of the early history of "Lin, or Notable People," it is recorded that he owned a mill, probably in that town. He appears in Dedham in 1641, in Reading in 1646, in Providence in 1648, in New London in 1651, in Norwich in 1664, where he lived until his death, June 23d, 1687.

His changes of residence appear to be due to the fact that he was a contractor, or master builder. His services were in great request. He built churches, mills, houses, bridges and vessels. He built the first and second church in both New London and Norwich, and the first mill in each of those places. In fact, he was a miller in addition to being a millwright, shipwright and builder generally. He was in great repute in church building. While he was in Providence, R. I., in 1648, Governor Winthrop besought him to come to Connecticut, and "engaged Roger Williams to mediate in his favor," apparently with success, for in 1651 he was church building in New London. It is interesting to notice that he made his residence in Pequot, for this was the name which the English gave to much of the country about New London, it being the country out of

which they drove the Pequot Indians. One of the most interesting things in his life at New London is that he built the first merchant vessel ever owned or built there, the *New London Tryall* (Trial), in 1661. The building of this vessel, costing upwards of £200, was regarded as a great undertaking. Frequent references to him are made in the Winthrop Papers in the Massachusetts Historical Collections.

Besides this, he kept the town inn at New London. There are two entries worth quoting from the records, *literatim* :

“ Nov. 6, 1654.

“ John Elderkin was chosen Ordinary Keeper for Pequot, or New London.”

“ Generall Court of Election,

“ Hartford, this 17th of May, 1655.

“ John Elderkin of Pequett, being p'sented to this Court as chosen by ye Towne of Pequett to keepe an ordinary, according to order of Courte, wch he hath accepted of to attend after 29 Sept: next. The Court confirms him in that place.”

John Elderkin went to Norwich about 1661, not as the first settler, but in a company from New London. The town of Norwich dates from 1660; that was probably the year in which the site was fixed upon. Early the next year the company from New London went there. This appears from a deposition given in Court by John himself. A *fac-simile* of his signature is given in the “ History of Norwich,” page 216. John Elder-

kin was not recorded among the earlier proprietors nor does his name appear on the plan of the house lots of 1660. He had two home lots granted him in remuneration for services, just for what services history does not state. The first lot was probably given to him in 1667, but being at too great a distance from his business, it was conveyed, with the consent of the town, to Samuel Lothrop, August 24, 1668, and another lot given to Elderkin at the Old Landing place below the Falls, where, according to contract, he built a grist mill. This point had always been a favorite landing place of the Indians. A spring of pure water near by was famous far and wide. Forty acres on the south side of the Little Plain side hills, upon the cove, were given to the Mill, "to lye to it with the landing place, for the use of the town," and to be improved by John Elderkin, the miller. This grant covered the Indian burying-place; a reservation was made that the Indians should have free access to the spot and the right of burial. The grant extended over the greater part of what is now Washington Street, Norwich.

In the roll of freemen of the colony, recorded in 1668, Norwich has twenty-five, among them John Elderkin.

By the town vote of 1669 there was "granted to Mr. Brewster and John Glover two bits of land on the east side of Showtucket River, near their own land, they two, with the help of Goodman Elderkin, to agree peaceably about the division of it between them, and

in case they can't well agree about the division, then it falls to the town again."

Equally quaint was the petition presented the town by Elderkin, when in 1673 he had been commissioned to build a new meeting-house.

CHRISTIAN FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS: Your humble petitioner pleadeth your charitie for the reasons hereafter expressed. Gentlemen, it is well known that I have been undertaker for building of the meeting hous, and it being a work very difficult to understand the whole worth and value off, yet notwithstanding I have presumed to doe the work for a certain sum of money (to wit) 428 pound, not haveing any designe thereby to make myself rich, but that the towne might have there meeting-house dun for a reasonable consideration. But upon my experience, I doe find by my bill of cost, I have dun said work very much to my damage, as I shall now make appear. Gentlemen, I shall not say much unto you, but onely if you may be made sencible of my loss in said undertaking, I pray for your generous and charitable conclusion toward me whether it be much or little, I hope will be well excepted from your poor and humble petitioner.

JOHN ELDERKIN.

It is gratifying to know that in compensation for the gallery of the new meeting-house the town granted Elderkin a tract of land "at Pocketannuck's cove's mouth."

In March, 1698, a "leanto" was added to the church, and Goodman Elderkin, carpenter, was engaged to arrange the pews into eight classes, according to their dignity, viz: "The square pue to be considered first in dignity, the new seats and the fore seats in the broad alley next, and alike in dignity," and so on

through the eight classes. This custom prevailed in all the settlements. A "paper vote" was taken whenever a meeting-house was finished and a committee elected to "dignify the seats." The rules for seating were formed on an estimate of age, rank, office, estate list and aid furnished in building. Frequent disputes and bitter feuds often resulted from the custom.

He was twice married. His first wife's given name was Abigail. When and where married and date of her death are unknown. His second marriage was to Mrs. Elizabeth (Drake) Gaylord, daughter of John Drake, and widow of William Gaylord, of Windham, March 1st, 1660. She died at Norwich, June 8th, 1716, aged ninety-five years. This Elizabeth Drake was a lineal descendant of Henry de Bohun, first Earl of Hereford. In her family the line runs straight to three of the seven Earls who were elected guardians of Magna Charter.

John Elderkin 2nd, eldest son of John Elderkin by Elizabeth Drake, his second wife, early became a settler upon the west bank of the Shetucket River near Lord's (then Elderkin's) Bridge, and his dwelling was located

**John  
Elderkin 2nd.**

upon the precise spot that is now occupied by the large boarding-house of Messrs. A. & W. Sprague, in the village of Baltic. He was the proprietor of the saw and grain mills near by. He often acted officially in the new society, and was particularly designated to direct in the layout of suitable highways or roads from the



outskirts of the settlement to the church. On an early map of Norwich, or West Farms, from 1663 to 1725, Sergt. John Elderkin's house, Elderkin's Mills and Elderkin's Bridge over the Shetucket River, are all laid down.

In the baptismal records of 1700 appears the registration:

Margaret, ye Daughter of Brother John Elderkin, 12d, 12m, 1700.

Doubtless this was a granddaughter of the original proprietor, since the latter's death is supposed to have occurred about 1687. The names of Hendy, Comstock, Gaylord and Fales were connected by marriage with that of Elderkin.

In December, 1713, John Elderkin 2nd completed a new church on the site of the one originally built by his father. He, too, lost by the transaction, and having prayed the town "to make some retaliation," was relieved by a grant of fifty acres of land.

The same individual had much to do with the wharfing, building and general beginnings of the "Landing" or present city of Norwich.

In 1692 a committee was appointed by the town to go with John Elderkin and to state a highway to the old Landing place, with conveniency also for a ware-house.

These memoranda are from the town records.

John Elderkin 3rd, eldest son of John Elderkin 2nd, by his wife, Abigail Fowler, daughter of Wm. Fowler, of Milford, was born in Norwich, May 7th, 1694; he married Susannah Baker, August 26, 1714. Very little is known

of the history of the third John Elderkin, but he was the father of three sons, all of whom were remarkable men. Col. Jedediah Elderkin was the eldest son, John Elderkin 4th and Dr. Joshua Elderkin, younger sons. The history of Col. Jedediah Elderkin is too long and well-known to be repeated here. He was a prominent lawyer of Windham, and a member of the General Assembly of Connecticut for seventeen years, and for over thirty years a justice of the peace. He was an ardent patriot, and during the American Revolution a member of the Governor's Council of Safety. At the March session of the General Assembly, in 1775, Jedediah Elderkin, Esq., was commissioned Colonel of the 5th regiment of Connecticut militia. Colonel Elderkin was one of the first Committee of Safety organized in 1775, and he continued throughout the whole Revolutionary War in positions of honor and trust, rendering important services to his country in its hour of greatest need and peril. His last important public service was as a member of the convention which ratified the United States Constitution. His youngest brother, Dr. Joshua Elderkin, was also a man of great ability and energy, and celebrated in the annals of Connecticut as an ardent patriot. He was a graduate of Yale College.

John Elderkin 4th, the second son of John Elderkin 3rd, was born Feb. 3rd, 1719. Little is known of his history until he was commissioned as quartermaster, July

6th, 1775. The Elderkins had now become large landholders, and were among the wealthiest people of New England. The first John Elderkin had accumulated property in land, and at one time sold a tract of 770 acres to Antipas Newman, son-in-law of Gov. Winthrop. John 4th was probably a farmer and builder like his ancestors. He was a man who was trusted and capable, or he would not have been so frequently commissioned as quartermaster. In 1777 he was commissioned as quartermaster in Col. Charles Webb's regiment, the 19th Continental. Jan. 1st, 1778, he was commissioned as quartermaster in the 2nd regiment, Connecticut line. He served as quartermaster in the regiment in which Nathan Hale was captain. These appointments are recorded in the recent volume issued by the State of Connecticut, entitled "Record of Connecticut men in the War of the Revolution."

Susannah Elderkin, daughter of John Elderkin 3rd, born in Norwich, Aug. 12th, 1722, married Jabez Bigelow of Hebron, Conn., and from her are descended a number of distinguished men, among them Prof. Melville M. Bigelow, of Cambridge, Mass. Professor Bigelow is an eminent lawyer of Boston, and the author of several authoritative legal text-books in use in the best law schools.

John Elderkin 4th married Rebecca Allen of Norwich in 1742. Their first child, John Elderkin 5th, was born Jan. 16th, 1743. He was educated at Yale

College, and probably lived at Groton, or in the vicinity, until he died at a comparatively early age.

Joshua Elderkin, the second son of John Elderkin 4th, was born in 1750. He married Elizabeth, daughter of Samuel Newton, of Groton. He was the father of Dr. John Elderkin, the ancestor of the Long Island Elderkins. Dr. John Elderkin studied medicine with Dr. John O. Minor at Groton, from 1800 to 1804, when he removed to Setauket, on the north side of Long Island, near the Sound. Dr. Elderkin married Martha Smith, daughter of one of the early proprietors, who inherited a large tract of land in the middle of the island, which is still in the possession of her descendants.

Dr. John Elderkin inherited the taste for building which characterized his original progenitor. He built most of the houses composing the old village of Setauket, those about the mill pond. He was a popular physician, an enterprising and successful business man, a wise counselor and a genial companion. The principal families of Setauket of his day were the Floyds, the Strongs and Woodhulls, from whom many notable people are descended. The Hon. Selah B. Strong was a member of Congress and Justice of the Supreme Court of the State. The Floyds were descendants of William Floyd, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. Dr. Elderkin was the friend and fam-

ily physician of the best people for thirty miles about Setauket, and his reputation as a good physician is a tradition among the older residents in all that part of the country. He belonged to the Masonic fraternity. Dr. Elderkin left one son, who also bore the ancestral name of John. This John Elderkin also studied medicine, but did not become a physician.

**John  
Elderkin 7th.**

He was the third graduate of the New York College of Pharmacy, and engaged in the drug business in Pearl St., not far from the corner of Vandewater St., in the City of New York.

In addition to his son John, Dr. Elderkin left two daughters. Mary, the eldest, married Thomas Gwynne, a cotton merchant of New York City. John A. Gwynne, the well-known banker, lately of the firm of Gwynne & Day, is one of her sons. Her son, William Gwynne, served throughout the War of the Rebellion in the Union army. The youngest daughter of Dr. Elderkin, Augusta Frederica, married Charles Orme, of Clifton, Bristol, England, a man of good family, who held a judicial position in Bristol for many years. Her son, Robert Orme, studied medicine in Guys Hospital, London, and became a physician ; and Frederic Orme, another son, was an officer in the English army, and died in India.

After the death of Dr. Elderkin in 1836, John Elderkin, his son, removed from New York, and took up his residence in the family mansion at Setauket. Here he continued the business of druggist and general mer-

chant and postmaster, until his death in 1885. He married Renelcha Hallock, a daughter of Capt. Charles D. Hallock, of Stony Brook, a shipowner and shipbuilder. Mrs. Renelcha Elderkin was a woman of great refinement, energy and ambition. She was untiring in her efforts to give her children the advantages of education, social culture and sound moral principles. She excelled in every womanly quality, and her house was celebrated for comfort, intelligence and good cheer. Six children, four sons and two daughters, survived her. One of her daughters, Renelcha or Nellie, married John E. Tousey, a son of Sinclair Tousey, the late President of the American News Company. One son, George Hallock Elderkin, resides in the old town of Setauket, and is a Trustee of the Emma S. Clark Memorial Library, recently founded there by the late Thomas G. Hodgkins.

John Elderkin, the eldest son, on the invitation of Mr. Robert Bonner, of the New York *Ledger*, came with him to New York in 1856, and has since been a resident of New York City, and a professional journalist, editor and author; being connected at the present time with the paper founded by Robert Bonner, and continued by his sons. He married, in 1877, Mrs. Helen L. Chapman, widow of B. F. Chapman, of Dover Plains, N. Y., and only daughter of David B. Reed.

In 1865, William L. Weaver published in the *Willimantic Journal* a sketch of the Elderkin family as far

as he had been able to trace it from 1637 to 1865. At the close of his article, he says: "We have been much interested in tracing this family. It was of good stock, and, unlike some of our early families, has not deteriorated. Descendants in both the male and female line are highly respectable, and many talented men are found among them. Some of the characteristics of the family are patriotism, ambition, a love of military life, frankness, liberality and public spirit." The author of the Elderkin genealogy says: "To the above might be added with propriety that as a race of people they are strictly honest, and with few exceptions they have all embraced the Christian religion. So far as the writer has been able to learn, not one of the Elderkin name has been convicted of a crime in the ten generations, as recorded in his work. This family, taken in connection with the families of like grade and qualities of mind, make up the great central power of this nation of free men. They are America's strength in war and her resources in time of peace."

In this brief outline of the genealogy of that branch of the family which is traced down to the Long Island Elderkins of the present day, no reference has been made to other lines of the family. The Elderkins intermarried with the descendants of Elder William Brewster. Judge Elias Brewster, of Oswego Co., N. Y., married Harriet Clark, and she was the connecting link between the White, Elderkin and Brewster families; her mother, Mary Anne Elderkin, having been

the daughter of Vine Elderkin and Lydia White, daughter of Rev. Stephen White of Windham. Vine Elderkin was a son of Col. Jedediah Elderkin. The Elderkins also intermarried with the Jackson family, and Dr. James H. Jackson, the friend and co-laborer of Hon. Gerrit Smith, traced his descent from Col. Jedediah Elderkin, Col. Giles Jackson, Rev. Stephen White and Judge Elias Brewster. Hon. Noble S. Elderkin of Potsdam, St. Lawrence Co., N. Y., was a descendant of Bela Elderkin, second son of Col. Jedediah Elderkin. Major William Anthony Elderkin, U. S. A., is one of his sons. These are only a few of the more notable people of this sturdy New England family.