

History of John Elderkin

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, Massachusetts, one of his descendants, put 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, England, under the date of 12 June 1894, says that the Elderkins came from the Fenns, Lincolnshire. The Elderkins are known in Northumberlandshire history, and were probably one of the English and Scottish border families.

John Elderkin came to New England, and is first heard of at Lynn, Massachusetts, 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 on 23 June 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, Rhode Island 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 pds, 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 and 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 Elderkin 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 of services, just for what services history does not state. The first lot was probably given to his business, it was conveyed, with the consent of the town, to Samuel Lothrop, 24 August 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 reason 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 sertain 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 post, 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 understanding, 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 humbe 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, of Windham, 1 March 1660. She died at Norwich, 8 June 1716, aged 95 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 the Magna Charter.

History of John Elderkin 2nd

John Elderkin 2nd, eldest son of John Elderkin by Elizabeth Drake, his second wife, early became settlers upon the west bank of the Shetucket River near Lord's (then Elderkin's) Bridge, and his dwelling was located upon the precise spot that is now occupied by the large boarding house of Messrs. A. & W. Sprague in the village of Baltic in Connecticut. 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, 2d, 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," 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

convenience also for a ware-house.

John married first Abigail Fowler, probably daughter of William, of Milford, 1685; she died March, 1713-14. He married second to widow Hannah Coleman on 16 August 1720.

The date of death of John has not been found.