

History of William Cheney

William Cheney was born in Lambourn, England on 31 July 1603. He married Margaret Burdge about 1625.

William Cheney was a very early resident of Roxbury, in the colony of Massachusetts Bay, in New England, (now included in the city of Boston.) The oldest records of that town which have been brought down to modern times are contained in a volume whose opening sentence says that the book was bought in 1639 for the purpose of recording various matters relating to the inhabitants. Its earliest entries are not dated. One of these is a list of the men who owned land and lived in the town, entitled "A note of the estates and persons of the Inhabitants of Rocksbery." Sevety men are enrolled; they range from "Edward Pason," possessor of 3 acres of ground, to "Mr Thomas Dudley" with his 356 acres. "Wm Cheiney" is the fortieth name, with 24.5 acres, showing that he was above the average in wealth. This list is on a page where the year 1640 is given as the date of a preceding entry; and 1642 is the date of the entry on the following page. A number of circumstances indicate that the list was written near the close of the year 1640. On other pages of the old record book there are deeds of land recorded, and "the meadow of Cheyney" are mentioned; both were made in 1640. These records demonstrate the fact that William Cheney was a land-holder and resident in Roxbury before 1640; and they do no more.

The settlement at Roxbury was begun in 1630, a little later than those at Dorchester and Boston; but there was no church

organized for a year, and no pastor till 1632. In the records of the Church of Roxbury, written by the first pastor, who was that remarkable "Apostle to the Indians," Rev. John Eliot, there is a very interesting list of members, giving many personal sketches. They are arranged, in a general way, according to the dates of their joining the church, which was sometimes the order on which they came to New England. But a good many men and women did not unite with the churches at once upon their arrival; in certain instances they were unwilling to leave their allegiance to the English church; sometimes they were not considered by the ministers to be suitable persons to be admitted; in other cases they were modest about themselves, and feared they were not worthy. From some cause or other William Cheney himself did not join until he had been in Roxbury at least twenty four years; for it was "5th 1m 1664/5" that he was "admitted to full communion." His wife joined much earlier. In view of her membership it was that "4 (4) 1643 Mehittabell Cheyny the daughter of William Cheyny" was baptized. But Mr Eliot does not give us the date when she joined. Her name is the 210th in his series; it follows a little way after some who are said to have arrived in 1636, 1638 and 1641, mingled with undated names; and the next member whose date of joining is given was "received the 21 of the 2d 1644."

"--- Cheny the wife of William Cheny."

That is the entry; a score of woman are so recorded before this line; the good parson could not remember all the Christian names of the sister! The date of coming may have been long before

her joining; and her membership must have been before 1643. There the direct evidence stops.

In the Roxbury Land Records there is a detailed description of each settler's real estate, with the names of the owners of adjacent tracts.

William Cheney's homestead lay in a bend of the old highway which is still a well trodden thoroughfare--Dudley street--on the southeast side, near its junction with Warren st. The other tracts of land were widely scattered.

William Cheney his house barne Garden and land theirto about two accres and a halfe butting upon William Parkes south and est and upon the highway north and west; And sixteene accres in the great lotts more or less betweene the lands of John Johnson towards the west, and the schoole lands towards the east. And ten accres of swamp neare the great lotts lying betweene Giles Pason, and Ralph Hemingway, and the heires of Samuell Hagborne. And six accres of salt marsh in Gravelly piont. And six accres of fresh meadow in the great meade, upon John Stowe his heires east, and Richard Sutton west, with two rodde wide of upland at both ends and so upon the commons. And seaven accres more or less of errable land upon Richard Sutton north, John Gorton west, and upon John Turner south. And in the first and third alottment of the last perission being the fift lott lying betweene John Johnson and heires of George Alcocke threescore and sixteene accross and a halfe and ten rod. And three and twenty accres of land and a halfe within the thousand accres neare Deddam. And twenty accres of land

more or less lying in the great lotts bounded on the way to the fresh meadow on the east the land of the heires of John Leven on the south, the schoole land and Richard Peacockes north west and upon Giles Pason and the highway northerly. And three accres and a halfe of meadow lying in the fresh meades butting east upon my owne fresh meade and upon John Peirpoynt west. And an accres of land commonly called the wolf trapp bought of Humphrey Johnson lying on the north of the land of John Gorton, and west upon the highway. And halfe of sixteene accres of woodland lately the land of Richard Sutton, but bought by him of John Johnson."

We find two deeds of William Cheney's, one of land he bought, the other of some he sold; one of which is given here.

"29.3.1648.

"Humphrey Johnson of Roxbury granted unto Willim Chenie of Roxbury twenty Acres of land in Roxbury bounded with the high way that leads to the fresh meddow on the East, the land of the heires of John Levens south, the schoole lands & Richard Peacocks north west, & Giles Pason & the high way Northerly & this way by an absolute deed of sale 2 (1) 1647.
with all priviledgs thereto belonging.

Humphrey Johnson and a seale"

Sealed & dd in p'sence
of William Aspinwall
Nicholas Butler

The annals of the town do not give the proceedings of town meetings in the earliest days, but there are a few movements of the citizens which are noted well. One of these is the founding in 1645 of the Roxbury Free School, supported by voluntary subscriptions but managed by town officers.

The original paper with its autograph signatures is extant. It shows William Cheney not only as a subscriber to the fund but as one of the few leading men who specially guaranteed to the town the payment of their yearly contributions.

His subscription to the school-fund was eight shillings a year,--more than the average. It is disappointing to find that our ancestor made his "mark" upon these documents. Possibly his eyesight had failed; but as he was only forty-one years old the probability is that he had not learned to write, as was the case with a great majority of the people of England in that age.

To go back again in the history, we find that William Cheney was elected to the board of assessors of the infant borough at an early day.

February 21, 1648 "It was voted that John Johnson... and William Cheney should be the men that shall....ensuring year rate men according to theire estat....the defraying of ye fore sayd Charges of ye Ministry."

A few years afterward he was called upon to use that good judgment and fair-mindedness which he seems to have possessed in good amount in another matter. William Cheney was chosen to be a Deacon.

One of the offices that called for promptness and energy and for good faculty of dealing with men was the position of constable. He was the policeman on disagreeable occasions; the messenger of the selectmen sometimes; but his chief care was collecting taxes. He had a "rate" committed to him, with a sum to be obtained from each adult male inhabitant; and he had authority to pay out sums of money on selectmen's orders. At the end of the year he made a detailed report. If he did not possess a good education he must have a sharp faculty of reckoning and a strong memory of names and numbers. William Cheney was one of the two constables in 1654/5 and his final account was approved February 13, 1655/6.

But the citizens were not content to have him simply perform the toilsome work of a constable. January 19, 1656/7 he was elected a member of the board of selectmen, associated with men of education and rank.

May 23, 1666, he was made a "freeman of the Colony," which made him eligible to colonial office and capable of voting on matters relating to the general government. But he did not live to make use of this franchise. He fell sick in the spring of 1666/7, as we learn from the opening phrases of his will; and after a few weeks he passed beyond the reach of care or pain. The town clerk made this entry in his list of persons deceased:

"William Cheney aged 63 yeares died June the 30 day, 1667"; and the hand of either Rev. John Eliot or Rev. Samuel Danforth wrote in the church book among the burials:

"1667, Moneth 5 day 2 William Cheney sen."

The Will of William Cheney

of Roxbury Massachusetts, 1667

"Being sick of body and of perfect understanding & memory according to my measure I doe make this my last will & Testament. I doe committ my soul into the Armes of the Everlasting mercy of God my saviour & deare & blessed Redeemer & my body unto my friends & relations to be decently interred by them in hope of a blessed Resurrection. As for that Estate which it hath pleased the Lord to lend unto mee I doe dispose of as followeth:

Imp my will is that my deare & afflicted wife margaret Cheney bee Carefully & sufficiently priveded for duringe the time of her naturall life to that end my will is that shee have & Enjoy all the rent & profits yearely & Every yeare duringe the aforesaide tearme....of all my Houses Lands & Orchards that I die possessed of Either in Roxbury Boston or Elsewhere. Except such part of my Lands or Estate which I shall hereafter in this my will dispose of to my children or otherwise, which Estate bequeathed by mee unto my said wife it is my will shee Enter upon & bee possessed of immediately after my decease (to wit) the present crop upon all the Land. & the use of all my Household stuffe & goods my debts & funerall Expences in the first place being with all Convenient speed fully discharged : & for my said wives more Comfortable being, my desire is that one of my Executors may live in my house in Roxbury with her to Enjoy the housing & Lands by the yeare, which I have as is afiresaid given unto my said wife, upon such Equall tearmes as my other Exectors & overseers.....secondly what

remaines of my Estate after my said wive decease either in stock of otherwise in housing of Lands or other Estate in any kind undisposed of by this my will is that the one halfe of it bee given to my sonn Joseph Cheiney & for the other halfe thereof is that it divided into ffoure Equall parts. And soe disposed of it to sonn John Cheiney & to my Three aforesd daughters to each of them and Equal Portion thereof Lastly I doe make my Loving sonns Thomas Cheiney & Thomas Hastings executors of this my will, requesting my deare & respected friends John Elliot, Deacon William Parke & Edward Bugbee Overseers, April the last sixty seaven.

William W Cheiney

his marke & a seale

Witnesses

John Newell

Samuell Scarbarow