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Yarmouth Personages

An Introduction

William Hutchinson Rowe





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An attempt to revive the memory of individuals whose names were once household words in old North Yarmouth and Yarmouth.

WILLIAM HUTCHINSON ROWE

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Foreword.

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A town's richest heritage is her history. The memory of the men and women, her sons and daughters, who have linked their names with hers, helped to form her ideals, bring to pass her achievements and make her name known to the world, should be treasured as jewels, nor, indeed, should they be hidden away between the unturned pages of musty historical records, but set in the appropriate matrix of the living imaginations of the present generation.

Richer would be the lives of the men and women of the Yarmouth of to-day were they better acquainted with the men and women of the Yarmouth of yesterday. With a more loving zeal would they believe in and work for the future of their town did they realize the worth of its past.

We fear that our sketches of these personages have been but clumsy; brief and circumstantial they were of necessity, yet they may serve as introductions which will lead to a better acquaintance growing from more to more, till on the eastern bank of the river which bears his name our imaginations build once again the log house of William Royall; till we cannot pass Callen Point without a thrill when we think of gallant Captain Gendall; till Parson Gilman with his great wig and gold topped cane is a part of our daily life and the heart sighs at the mention of Edward Thaxter.

Time has proved these worthy of your acquaintance.

Personages.

WILLIAM ROYALL

CAPT. WALTER GENDALL

REV. AMMI RHUHAMAH CUTTER

JUDGE JEREMIAH POWELL

JOSEPH WEARE

REV. TRISTRAM GILMAN

JUDGE DAVID MITCHELL

GEN. EDWARD RUSSELL

ALEXANDER BARR

ELIZABETH OAKES SMITH

DR. ELEAZER BURBANK

EDWARD THAXTER

William Royall.

The beautiful river on whose banks he was the first to settle will forever memorialize the name of William Royall.

Nearly three hundred years ago Governor Endicott received a letter introducing our pioneer as a cooper and clapboard cleaver and he was welcomed to Salem where for several years he worked at his trade, in the meantime, wooing and marrying Phoebe Green the step daughter of Samuel Cole, Boston's first confectioner and tavern keeper.

Ten or more years later he came to Casco Bay and in 1643 purchased of Gorges a triangle containing about two thousand acres bounded by what are now Cousins and Royall Rivers and a line running from the first falls of the latter to the convergence of the branches of the former.

Among the first settlers of the province he was held in esteem and his name often appears in places of public honor. Thirty years or more he improved his plantation till, old age drawing on, he deeded it to his two sons, William and John, and moved to Dorchester where in 1676 he died.

Romantic in the extreme is the later history of the family. It would be interesting could we tell of his son John who was ransomed from the Indians by Baron Castine; of his grandson Isaac, the adventurer of Antigua; of his tory great grandson, Colonel Royall and his lordly estate in Medford; or to trace the family line by which the Palmers, a Baronial house of England, find their maternal ancestry leading them back to William Royall "cooper and cleaver" of "Westcustogo in Casco Bay."

Capt. Walter Gendall.

Plymouth had her soldier in Captain Miles Standish, North Yarmouth her soldier and hero in Captain Walter Gendall. His was a life so filled with romance, adventure and achievement that it would furnish material for a Waverly novel. His was a death so tragic and heroic that Scott alone could do it justice.

In telling of him much must be omitted and a great deal crowded into little space. He was an Englishman, came as a youth to the Trelawney Plantation about 1640, settled in Scarborough, married Joan Guy of Falmouth and had many adventures and held many offices in the various neighboring towns. In 1680 he bought land in North Yarmouth and the next year erected a prosperous establishment at Pungustuk Falls, his saw mill producing 100,000 feet of lumber yearly. Soon, however, the second Indian war broke out and on the banks of Royall's River the first blood was shed in the province. John Royall's house on the eastern side was a garrison. The government ordered Gendall to build a second on the opposite bank. The men going to their work on this in September 1688, met Indians who soon proved hostile. Few in number the English retired to the high river banks where they defended themselves till their ammunition gave out. Seeing their plight, Gendall, trusting in his favorable standing with the Indians, started across with a supply of powder and ball. But before he reached the other shore he received a mortal wound and mustering his last strength he could just throw the needed ammunition to his friends and lived only long enough to say, "I have given my life in your service."

Rev. Ammi Ruhamah Cutter.

On the same day and by the same Council that incorporated the First Parish Church, November 18, 1730, Rev. Ammi Ruhamah Cutter was ordained and made its pastor at a salary of one hundred and twenty ounces of silver annually. He was then a young man of twenty-five, a native of West Cambridge and a graduate of Harvard. He had been chosen by the proprietors as pastor of the proposed church after having ministered to its congregations about a year. His person was tall and commanding, his eye piercing and his preaching vigorous and original. Too original it would seem for his straight-laced congregation for he remained their pastor only five years.

He was, however, especially skilled as a physician and for seven more years practiced in town thus holding the double honor of being the town's first minister and doctor. Here also he found his wife Dorothy Bradbury.

The general court in 1742, recognizing his probity and general discretion, appointed him keeper of an Indian trading post or "truck house" at Saco where he remained three years. His active mind found occupation in compiling a dictionary and grammar of the dialects of the Ossipee and Pegwacket tribes to facilitate his intercourse with them.

He accompanied General Pepperel on the famous Louisburg expedition as the Commander of a company and after the surrender of the place, remained as chief surgeon, but an epidemic breaking out, he died in March, 1746 at the early age of forty-one, after a life remarkable for its great energy, activity and usefulness.

Jeremiah Powell.

It is significant of the quality of the early inhabitants of North Yarmouth, that of their number four were selected to be Judges of the Court of Common Pleas of Cumberland County. They were Jeremiah Powell, Jonas Mason, David Mitchell and John Lewis.

The father of the first of these was John Powell, who left a Boston home and business to settle in the backwoods, and taking a wild lot on the shores of Broad Cove, eventually turned the wilderness into a garden, built an elegant mansion and lived in lordly style. Jeremiah was born in Boston in 1720, his mother being the sister of Lieut. Governor Dummer and his uncle whose name he bore, the celebrated agent of Massachusetts at the Court of Queen Anne. When his father died, in 1742, he took his establishment at North Yarmouth. At the early age of twenty-five, he was sent as representative and served the town in this position seventeen years, when he was chosen into the Provincial Council. In 1763 he became chief justice of Cumberland County, which seat he held for eighteen years.

He was an enterprising man of business and the Powell estate lost nothing under his management. Among his many projects was the iron works at Gooch's Falls, which he started in company with Theophilus Byram. Late in life he married Miss Sarah Bloomfield of Boston but they had no children. He was a friend of George Whitfield, and was in Newburyport on the night of the famous evangelist's death. In 1784, he died at his home. His colored coachman, Boston, and Dinah, the cook, together with the glorious hospitality dispensed by him, yet live in the imaginations of the people.

Joseph Weare.

Those to whom the names of Royall, Gendall, Cutter or Powell are meaningless, can nevertheless tell long stories of, "Joe Weare, the Scout." His personality has formed the nucleus in our community, around which have gathered the traditions told for years, regarding some local hero from the Susquehannah to the Penobscot. Dark, bony, capable of great endurance, six feet two inches in height and "full of strategy" he captured the imaginations of the people and doubtless did them great service in giving special attention to the enemies of civilization.

At his birth, March 9, 1737, he inherited a hate for the Indians, for, twelve years before, his mother's father, Joseph Felt, had been killed by them at Broad Cove and his grandmother and the younger children carried into captivity under circumstances of extreme cruelty.

When twenty-three years old he had a saw mill near where the cotton mill stands and an old account book kept by him at that time is still in existence, in the possession of Edward A. Woods of Pittsburg, Penn. He had married in 1760 Mary Noyes and the immediate cause of the purchase of the book seems to be to record the birth of their first child, Nathaniel. Not a word about Indians occurs from beginning to end. Nine children were born to them, but the family name has now become extinct, although the good blood flows in the veins of several Yarmouth families.

While on a trip to Boston, he died at about the age of forty and his body lies in the "old Indian burying ground" below the Ledge.

Rev. Tristram Gilman.

Enshrined in the holy of holies of the father's memory and even after a hundred years spoken with reverence by those who know him only by tradition, the name of Parson Gilman shines brightly in the early chronicles of the church and town.

Born in 1734 in Exeter, N. H. and in 1757 a graduate of Harvard, he was settled as fourth pastor of the First Parish in December 1769. His first sermon was preached from the text, "For other foundation can no man lay than is laid, which is Christ Jesus," and his forty years of successful labor and blessed ministry was a fitly framed building of gold, silver and precious stones on the sure foundation.

He was a fine example of the best type of our colonial clergymen, strong in body and mind, studious, decidedly evangelical and giving himself at all times with diligence and enterprise to the duties of his calling. His service covered the days of the Revolution and the critical period following, and we find him an ardent patriot, even in the discouraging year of 1776 preaching his annual Thanksgiving Day sermon from Psalm 34:1. In 1791 the "Great Revival" broke out which brought his church an addition of ninety-two. Three hundred and two were admitted during his whole pastorate. He anticipated the Sunday School and there are many fire-side stories told of the Parson sitting on the deacons' seat of the "Old Church Under the Ledge," catechising the children and explaining and applying the ten commandments. In 1809 he died. Like Goldsmith's village preacher he had for nearly half a century,— "Allured to brighter worlds and led the way."

David Mitchell.

The name of Mitchell has always been an honored one in North Yarmouth. Of eight deacons of the First Parish Church bearing that name, David is the third. He was born in Pembroke in 1728 and came to North Yarmouth when about fifteen with his father, Deacon Jacob, and settled in the Mitchell Garrison which we of the later generation knew as the "Old Whitcomb Place." His capabilities were such that he was sent to Harvard and was the first of that name enrolled on its catalogue. He prepared for the ministry, but his eyesight failing, he gave this up and taught the grammar school of the town, excelling in this profession. When thirty-three he married Lucretia, the eldest daughter of Rev. Nicholas Loring, and the next year was elected town clerk and continued to be reelected thirty-three years in succession. Many most important offices were held by him during the Revolutionary War and he took an active part in explaining and recommending the new Constitution. He served as representative to the Provincial Congress, was in the Massachusetts Senate, was first treasurer of the Trustees of Bowdoin College and served for eighteen years as Judge of the Cumberland Court of Common Pleas, being part of that time its chief justice. In the spring of 1796 while attending the Senate, his final sickness came upon him and he returned to North Yarmouth to die.

Parson Gilman in his funeral sermon speaks of him as "a worthy model in all the stations of life * * * a finished gentleman of the old school * * * a teacher by precept and example."

Edward Russell.

Of all Yarmouth's notable sons none ever held a more honorable place in the councils of the state than General Edward Russell. His father was a much respected physician of the town and his mother a descendent of the distinguished Phillips family of Andover, so that Edward came into the world August 31, 1782 endowed with the best that blood can give.

At the age of twenty-one he graduated from Harvard and afterward settled in Yarmouth as a justice of the peace, representing the town in the Legislature for several years. In 1808 he was elected town clerk and the clearly written, concise and accurately reported records of the town for twenty-one years are in his handwriting. In 1829 he was elected Secretary of State. When the paper to raise funds for the erection of an academy building was circulated, he, jointly with his mother and sister, contributed the lot now occupied by North Yarmouth Academy and served as Secretary of its board of trustees twenty-one years. Many were his public offices and honors,—Overseer of Bowdoin College, Brigadier General of Militia, Director of United States Branch Bank and the first corresponding secretary of the Maine Historical Society.

He was much interested in antiquarian studies and at the centennial of the town, held in 1833, in the old church under the ledge, delivered a historical address that is the first formal contribution to our written history. He also commenced to arrange materials for a full history of the town and great is our loss that his death in 1835 prevented this being finished.

Alexander Barr.

In the progress of his historical address at the Centennial of the town in 1833, General Edward Russell paused to point with pride to the fact that the man who first set in motion machinery for the spinning and carding of cotton in New England, was present in the audience. This was Alexander Barr, who had bought the Powell Estate at Broad Cove, comprising what is now the farms of Russell and Saint Claire, and was living thereon.

Alexander and his brother, Robert, were Scotchmen who had been trained in the machine shops of the celebrated Arkwright, and who came to this country about the close of the Revolutionary War. In 1786, they were commissioned by the Massachusetts Legislature to make a carding machine and spinning jinnery to serve as a model for the cotton spinners of this country, and thus are said to have completed the first of these machines in the United States.

The later portion of his life was spent on the beautiful shores of the Cove, in what is now the town of Cumberland, where he ran a mill for grinding plaster, on Felt's Brook, and gratified his love of the beautiful by planting an orchard and setting out many luxuriant shade trees about his home. The beautiful avenue of stately elms that border the road are a monument to his refined taste and industry. At the good old age of eighty he died, in 1837, and his headstone still stands in the old cemetery.

Elizabeth Oakes Smith.

One of the most noted American women of her time, beautiful, talented, a poet, author and orator, the intimate friend of Whipple, Emerson and Theodore Parker, North Yarmouth is proud of the honor of having been the birthplace of Elizabeth Oakes Prince.

Born in 1806, eighteen years later she married Se'la Smith, himself a poet and gifted man of letters, the original Major Jack Downing and founder of the Portland Courier, the first daily newspaper east of Boston. With such a couple as a nucleus, their home in Patchogue, N. J. to which they went in 1837, became a noted literary and social center in the second third of the last century.

Mrs. Smith was for a time editor of the Boston Miscellany, the fore-runner of the Atlantic Monthly and was the first woman to appear as a public speaker in America. She was an ardent abolitionist and advocate of woman's rights, while her stories and poems drew favorable comment from such competent judges as Hawthorne and Lowell. She died in 1893 at the age of eighty-seven.

Much of her happy girlhood was spent at the home of her grandfather Prince in what is now Cumberland Center, and she has drawn a beautiful picture of the family life in, "The Last of the Pilgrims, David Prince." One other of her stories, "The Defeated Life" contains a vivid picture of the Old Meeting House Under the Ledge known to her as a girl.

Dr. Eleazer Burbank.

Around the honored names of the two Doctors Burbank, father and son, twines the affectionate memory and loving regard of many of the older residents of Yarmouth. Of Doctor Eleazer, the father, it is our privilege to speak at this time. Born in Scarborough in 1793, his strength of character manifested itself when, after arriving at his majority, he walked the one hundred or more miles to Dartmouth College to educate himself for his life work. This done, he settled in Poland, where he enjoyed a large practice for about eighteen years, when he was invited by a committee from Yarmouth to fill the place left vacant by the death of Doctor Gad Hitchcock. While in Poland he married Sophronia, the sister of the elder Hiram Ricker.

Coming to Yarmouth in 1838, for twenty-nine years he ministered to the people. He had a high reputation, founded on merit alone, as a skillful, faithful and intelligent physician with a firm unerring judgment and a large heartedness which enabled him to minister to needs other than those of the body. He also took an active and prominent part in the affairs of the town, serving many years as moderator of the annual meetings. In 1857-58 he was elected to the Senate.

His interest in religious affairs was strong. He was a deacon of the Congregational Church sixteen years and at the time of his death in 1876, held in it six distinct offices.

Edward Russell Thaxter.

Tears start unbidden in the eyes of many even now at the mention of the name of Edward Thaxter. Yarmouth lost her son of greatest promise and America one of her most talented sculptors when the beautiful young dreamer of twenty-four left unfinished his ideal of "Reverie" to pass to where weakness and disease do not hamper and one may "draw the thing as he sees it for the God of things as they are."

Born in Yarmouth, February 15, 1857, his genius for sculpture early manifested itself even on such unpromising materials as potatoes, doughnuts, common clay and wood. At eighteen he entered Z. O. Perry's studio in Boston and two years later opened one of his own in Portland. For further study he sailed for Florence in 1872 and gave the world his first ideal entitled "Reproof." His second was an embodiment of his idea of Meg Merrilles. When twenty-four he completed his masterpiece, "Love's First Dream," which for sheer sweetness and pensive beauty of feature, grace and lightness of form, claims the imagination and lingers in the memory, not as dead marble but as a living Galatea.

Weakened by overwork after an attack of typhoid fever, on his way home he was stricken with brain fever at Naples and in June, 1881 passed away and was laid to rest in the Protestant Cemetery in Florence.

As one of our own poets, Mrs. E. D. Freeman writes;

"The day that glowed with brief and dazzling hope
Is darkened, and his true and silent heart
Lies in the breast of that fair, foreign
land."

Personals.

No more interesting or stirring material for a true story of sea adventure could be found than in the adventures of John Drinkwater. As mate of a sailing vessel in 1795 he was spared alone of all the officers when the crew mutinied, that he might navigate the ship. When, however, the west coast of Africa was reached, he with one companion was put ashore to starve in that desolate land. He found his way amid many perils to Cape Town and shipped home in a slaver. His hopes of a safe voyage were disappointed for a British man-of-war overhauled his vessel and he was impressed into the service where for three years he served, at last escaping and reaching Portland in 1802. Being obliged to walk from there to his house on the foreshore, he did not arrive until after midnight and going to the window of the room where his wife slept, he knocked. She, supposing some neighbor was sick, asked "Who is there?" upon which he replied, "It is John Drinkwater." She recognized his voice and opened the door to give a joyful welcome to the husband she had for seven years mourned as dead.

A number of men in the force which went up the Kenebec River in 1724 and totally destroyed Norridgewock Village, were recruited in the old domain of North Yarmouth before any of its six towns were separated from the original territory. Richard Jacques who then lived on the southern end of Bailey's Island was among them and is said to have fired the fatal shot that killed Father Rasle.

Rev. Francis Brown, the fifth pastor of the First Parish Church, was called from his pastorate here to the presidency of Dartmouth College.

Captain William A. Howard, who was chosen by the United States Government to hoist the American flag over our newly acquired possessions in Alaska, was born in Yarmouth in 1807. He entered the navy when seventeen and served with distinction during the Civil War and in the Revenue Marine. He also was appointed by the German Confederacy as second in Command on the Weser and superintended the building of a navy yard and dock at Brake.

The first woman in New England and probably within the limits of the whole Methodist Episcopal Church to be granted by the Conferance the right and freedom to exercise her gifts as a local preacher was Mrs. Mary Decker Wellcome. She was also a writer of more than local reputation and for many years contributed to various weekly and monthly periodicals.

Rev. George Dana Boardman, the "Apostle to the Karens," was ordained to his work by the Baptist Church in February, 1825. Through the courtesy of the Congregation-
alists, the exercises were held in their building, then almost new, which the later generation knew as the "Old Sloop."

Professor George Woods, principal of the Academy and founder of the old Institute, was afterward made Chancellor and Professor of Mental and Moral Sciences in Western University, Pittsburg, Penn.

Our Pledge.

Town of our homes as thy past we review,
Telling over again what the fathers have
done,
Of men who were strong and of women steel
true,
Of foundations deep laid and work well
begun;
Our pledge once more we gladly renew
O, town of our homes, to be loyal to you.

Town of our hearts as the beauty we feel,
Of thy elm-bordered streets and bold, rocky
shore,
Of Royall the lovely, that, turning the wheel
By usefulness adds to her beauty the more;
Thy praises aloft to the heavens shall soar,
O, town of our hearts, we will ever adore.

Town of our hopes as we look out to see
And find what the years may hold in their
hand,
Past and present withdraw and days yet to
be
In a glory far greater than others outstand;
Our allegiance we pledge, thy future de-
mand,
O, town of our hopes, by heart and by hand.

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