



CASTOR CANADENSIS

Newsletter of the Jedediah Smith Society • University of the Pacific, Stockton, California

WINTER 2011-2012

Jedediah Smith's Great Grandfathers

By Stephen Darley

In my previous article, I presented some information regarding Jedediah's father and grandfathers, as well as his brother Ralph. This article will look at the four great grandfathers of JSS. If, as many believe, the characteristics and traits exhibited by a descendant can to a large extent be traced to their forbearers, then it will be of interest to see who the great grandfathers were and what they were like.

Ezra Strong. This is the paternal grandfather of Jedediah's mother, Sally Strong. Ezra Strong was born in Lebanon, Connecticut in 1702 and married Abigail Caverly in 1731. More about her family later. Ezra was a farmer, first in Lebanon and later in Colchester, Connecticut, where he was one of the early settlers there in the center of what later became the Town of Marlborough. Ezra died on March 7, 1785. Ezra and Abigail had thirteen children. As far as the record shows, Ezra was an ordinary man who followed the occupation of farmer.¹ The family was ordinary with one important exception as follows.

According to, Temperance Phelps Strong of Hebron, a granddaughter of Ezra and Abigail, the Caverly family was a direct descendant of an heir to the throne of England. The family tradition is that in order to avoid bloodshed, the heir changed his name and subsequently fled to America with a ship load of silver. In the boat with the heir came a young man by the name of Caverly who served as his aide. The heir initially settled in Boston under the assumed name, which is not given, but changed his name again when he heard the British authorities were looking for him. At this point he ended up in Connecticut with the last name of Phelps. According to this tradition, his royal family name of Guelph was changed to Phelps. According to the family tradition, Temperance Phelps Strong's great grandfather, Solomon Phelps "owned a great deal of Boston and was a very rich man." According to the family tradition, some of the silver from the family treasure was buried in the walls of Ezra and Abigail's home.²

There is much to question in the family history and royal blood ties. No family descendant has been able to provide definitive proof of this claim but the family is listed in a web site under 700,000 people connected with European royalty. The family history that recites this story in terms of the Ezra Strong family sums it up as follows: "This family tradition has enough of the spice of curiosity in it to keep it good from one generation to

another. It is garnered up in these pages for the amusement of Abigail Caverly's descendants in all time."³

It does not appear that Ezra's wife, Abigail, brought a significant dowry with her to her marriage as she and her husband lived as simple farmers for their entire lives. I have done some very preliminary research on Solomon Phelps, who is named in the Temperance Strong history as the descendant with the royal connection, and his genealogy indicates that he had a father and grandfather named Phelps which would tend to undermine the family tradition. If the story has any credibility, Jedediah Smith had royal blood in his veins. Needless to say, verification of this fact is beyond the scope of this article.

Hosea Curtis. Hosea is the other grandfather of Jedediah's mother, Sally. Sally's mother's maiden name was Sarah Betsy Curtis. Her father, Hosea Curtis, was born in Hebron, Connecticut in 1716 and married Mary Gilbert in Hebron in 1737. They had ten children, one of who was Sarah Betsy, Sally Strong's mother.⁴ There is no information available as to Hosea's occupation but given the location of his home it is likely that he was a farmer. According to the Records of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, Hosea enlisted for service in that war. He was in Colonel Phineas Lyman's Company of the Connecticut Regiment in 1757 and in Captain Wells' Company of Colonel Whiting's Regiment in 1758.⁵ Both companies were in the battles to take Fort Ticonderoga, which failed in 1757 and succeeded in 1758. Hosea's company must have seen some action in these contests.

There is no record of Hosea's involvement in the Revolutionary War, which is not surprising given his age. There is also no record of his involvement in the affairs of Hebron or any religious affiliation. Hosea died in Hebron in 1790 at the age of seventy-four and from the record lived an uneventful life.

Deacon John Smith. Jedediah's great grandfather, John Smith, was born in Hadley, Massachusetts in 1697. He married his cousin, Elizabeth Smith, in 1727 at the age of thirty.⁶ His granddaughter, Chloe Smith Hayes wrote a diary that said as a seven year old boy, her grandfather remembered seeing the "smoke of the buildings they had left burning" in the 1704 Indian attack on the Deerfield settlement. She went on to say that "when he was married he went to South Hadley (later Granby) when it was a wilderness." She also stated that her grandfather was "an eminent Christian, and sustained that character, to the day of his death."⁷

While living in Hadley, John Smith was a "Deacon in various churches as they were constructed, and an active citizen in every way." One of the churches he was active in was the new meeting house built in 1714. By 1736 he was called as a deacon and

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known as Deacon John Smith. When the Town of South Hadley was made a separate district in 1753, Deacon John Smith was chosen as Town moderator. It is clear from his granddaughter's diary, Hadley town records and the written town history that John Smith was a religious man and active in his church. He was also active in the founding of the Hopkins Grammar School and Academy in 1720 and was still serving on its board in 1743.⁸ Those who prefer to see Jedediah Smith as a bible toting missionary to the Native Americans in the far west, as well as a fur trapper and explorer, will find in this great grandfather's life a model for Jedediah's religious convictions. It is important to remember that the notion of Jedediah as a religious zealot and aggressive missionary to the Indians was punctured in a previous Castor article.⁹

Two of Deacon Smith's eight sons rejected the patriot cause and were loyal to the crown during the Revolutionary War. They both married and lived in Halifax, Nova Scotia after the war. Both of these sons, Benjamin and Titus, were cut out of the Deacon's will which was written in 1778 while he was visiting his old home in Granby. John Smith and his wife Elizabeth moved to Brattleboro, Vermont with their son, Israel, in 1774. John Smith died in Brattleboro in 1784 at the age of eighty-seven.¹⁰ As was explained in my previous article, two of Deacon John's sons, Seth and Israel were active leaders in Vermont.

Seaborn Burt. Seaborn is Jedediah's other paternal great grandfather. In 1704, the Town of Deerfield, Massachusetts, was raided by Indians and burned with a number of residents captured and taken to Canada as prisoners. Among those taken captive were Benjamin Burt and his wife Sarah, who was eight months pregnant. On April 14, she delivered her first child who they named Christopher. Ensign John Sheldon of Deerfield subsequently made four trips to Canada to work to free the townspeople who were prisoners. On May 30, 1706, he finally was able to get over forty of the Deerfield family members in a boat to leave from Quebec to go to Boston, including the Burt family. Mrs. Burt was then pregnant with her second child. On the voyage home, she delivered that baby who they named Seaborn because he was born on board the ship while it sailed from the mouth of the St. Lawrence River to Boston.¹¹

Seaborn Burt's birth date is listed as July 4, 1706. His parents returned to Deerfield and then moved on to Stamford, Norwalk and finally Ridgefield, Connecticut. In 1712, Seaborn's father, Benjamin, was employed as the town blacksmith for a term of four years and given a plot of land. The family stayed on in Ridgefield and Seaborn married Susannah Lobdell there in 1737. They had a total of nine children, including Jedediah's grandmother Thankful, who married Seth Smith.¹²

Seaborn was initially a farmer because in 1732 he registered an ear mark for his cows in the Ridgefield town records. Subsequently, Seaborn moved his family to Mamasco Pond in Ridgefield where he ran a grist mill for the proprietors. Most of his children were born there and some lived there after they were married. It is interesting to note that in 1779, the proprietors of the mill took the title to the mill away from the heirs of

Seaborn and sold it to Benjamin Chapman of Salem, New York. Although no reason is given for this action, the United Empire Loyalist records make it clear that the reason had to do with the fact that Seaborn's son, Benjamin, who was running the mill until 1776, left the Town of Ridgefield to join the Tory faction in the Revolutionary War. In fact, two of his sons, Benjamin and David, joined the British forces and after the war moved to New Brunswick, Canada, where they married and settled. By 1779, Benjamin was not running the mill because of his involvement on the British side in the war and it was clear he would not be welcome back in Ridgefield.¹³

Seaborn's son, Joshua, who had gone to New York to join the British during the war, changed his allegiance from Britain to the patriot side and petitioned the town for reinstatement. In 1786, he was accepted by a vote of the town to return and live in Ridgefield as an inhabitant of the town. That return did not change the action of the proprietors of the grist mill.

The following land transactions are found relating to Seaborn and his family.

1. In 1743, Seaborn's wife, Susannah and her brothers conveyed their interest in land in Springfield, Massachusetts, in the estate of their father, Joshua, to Ebenezer Lobdell of Ridgefield.
2. One of Seaborn Burt's descendants has a copy of a deed for a parcel of land from Seaborn to his brother, Daniel, dated March 12, 1749.
3. On May 24, 1759, Seaborn and his siblings divided "the estate which our Honr'd father, Benjamin Burt, Decd, Died Siezed of."
4. A deed, dated Sept. 4, 1764, from Seaborn to his son, Benjamin, conveying 59 or 60 acres of land in Ridgefield "in Considn. Of Love & Good Will."
5. Another deed is mentioned in the records of the United Empire Loyalists which was a 1764 deed to Josiah Stebbins, then living in New Brunswick, Canada, from Seaborn Burt of "a 29th Part of the Common of Ridgefield."

Seaborn's last child, Theophilus, was born in Ridgefield in 1756, his father, Benjamin, died in 1759 and his last deed was in 1764 (see above). It seems at that point Seaborn had disposed of his Ridgefield lands either to his sons or others. After 1764, the public record relating to Seaborn is non-existent with the exception noted below. A biographer of the Burt family states that, "After disposing of his land, he removed to a place unknown to the compiler."¹⁴

One final clue to Seaborn and his wife is found in a claim by Seaborn's grandson, Benjamin, dated February 28, 1787, and witnessed by his father's brother David, found in the United Empire Loyalist Archives. David's witness states that 12 acres of land in Ridgefield that was contained in this New Claim was part of their mother's dower. David's witness also states that he "believes" their mother "is alive."¹⁵ The witness by David does not specify where Susannah was located, only that she was alive.

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Conclusion

In terms of how these four men's lives might have influenced Jedediah and helped to make him the man he became, it is difficult to see Jedediah clearly in any of them. Seaborn Burt's disappearance is troubling because it indicates that he had unspecified problems that caused him to vanish, and there was nothing in his life to that point that would indicate a future explorer. Deacon John Smith lived an uneventful if religious life, but nothing in it that would indicate the type of leadership that JSS demonstrated many times over. Hosea Curtis did serve as a private in the French and Indian War, but otherwise lived an uninspired life. Ezra Strong also seemed to live a common life exhibiting no outstanding leadership traits. The most interesting aspect of his great grandfathers' lives is the possibility that he had royal blood. The rest is fairly disappointing leading to the conclusion that the primary influence on Jedediah's character and leadership seems to have come from his two grandfathers.

¹ N. H. Owen. *Descendants of Jedediah Strong of Lebanon, Ct.* Interlochen, FL: Printed by author, 1989: 858-9. Ezra Strong. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=stevespeeps&id=19298>.

² Descendants, 859.

³ Descendants, 859.

⁴ <http://genealogy.the-franklins.net/getperson.php?personID=129887&tree=tree1>.

⁵ Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 168. Collections of Connecticut Historical Society, Vol. 10, 1905: 40.

⁶ Deacon John Smith, Family Tree, ancestry.com. Moving West: Thirteen Generations of a Smith Family. Generation Four, John Smith and Elizabeth Smith. Heathsmith Genealogies, work in progress. www.rootsweb.ancestry.com.

⁷ Moving West, John Smith.

⁸ Sylvester Judd. *History of Hadley*. Springfield, MA: H.R. Huntting & Co., 1905: 278-9, 310, 391, 394. Alice Morehouse Walker. *Historic Hadley*. New York: Grafton Press, 1906: 89-90.

⁹ James C. Auld. *Jedediah, His Religion and Bible*. Castor Canadensis, Fall 2002.

¹⁰ Deacon John Smith, Family Tree, ancestry.com.

¹¹ Henry Burt and Silas Burt. *Life and Times of Henry Burt of Springfield and Some of His Descendants*. Springfield, MA: Cark W. Bryan Co, 1893: 270-278.

¹² Roderick H. Burnham. *Genealogical Records of Henry and Ulalia Burt and Their Descendants Through Nine Generations, From 1649 to 1891*. Warwick, N.Y: Miss Elizabeth Burt, 1892: 53.

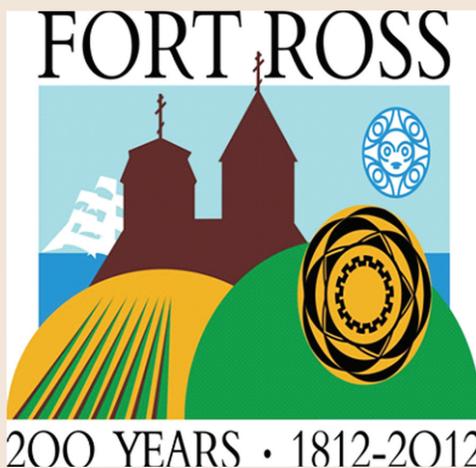
¹³ Mamanasco Lake, Pond. Ridgefield Place Names beginning with M. <http://jackfsaunders.tripod.com/names-M.htm>. United Empire Loyalists, Evidence of the Canadian Claims, Second Report of the Bureau of Archives for the Province of Ontario, Part I. Toronto, Canada: L.K. Cameron, 1905: 300-301.

¹⁴ Julia A. Lobdell. *Simon Lobdell, 1646 of Milford, Connecticut and His Descendants*. Chicago: Windermere Press, 1907: 19.

¹⁵ United Empire Loyalists, 301.

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Check the following web site for further events and details: www.fortrossstatepark.org

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