

Chapter XII

THE PROPRIETORS OF POCASSET

EDWARD GRAY, NATHANIEL THOMAS, BENJAMIN CHURCH,
CAPT. CHRISTOPHER ALMY, JOB ALMY, THOMAS WAITE, JR.,
DANIEL WILCOX, WILLIAM MANCHESTER

Edward Gray

The first named of the Pocasset proprietors owned three tenths of the entire tract. He has many descendants of the same name now living in our midst who are prominent in professional and social life. He came to Plymouth with a brother Thomas in 1643, at the age of fourteen years. Thomas died in 1654. It is reputed that these two boys were smuggled out of England by relatives who desired to retain possession of their inheritance. In Plymouth Edward became a merchant doing business in a very central location on Main street between Leyden and Middle streets. In 1651 he married Mary, a daughter of John Winslow and Mary Chilton Winslow. The writer is descended from Mary's sister Susanna who married Robert Lathan. John Chilton and Mary Chilton, and daughter Mary who married John Winslow, were Mayflower passengers and John Winslow was a brother of Gov. Edward Winslow. Gray's children by this marriage did not settle in this section.

In 1665 Edward Gray married Dorothy, a daughter of Thomas and Ann Lettis. Thomas Lettis had deceased leaving to Ann the mother valuable lands, also on Main street in Plymouth, and the mother conveyed these to the daughter, so that Edward Gray would have controlled most central estates on both sides of Main street, was very prominent and was also considered to be a wealthy citizen, — he was deputy to the general court from Plymouth in 1679 and 1680; he died in June 1681, so that he probably never visited the Pocasset lands; his grave on Burial Hill bears the oldest legible date, yet in spite of his wealth he signed his name by mark, which does not, according to the times, necessarily indicate that he could not read. He was

a peaceful man but outspoken, as is evidenced by the fact that he was in June 1668 fined ten shillings for using reviling speeches to one Bryant on the Lord's Day, "as soon as they came out of church". He left a large family. Mistress Dorothy Gray was appointed Administrator of his estate on July 7, 1681,¹ and on July 1, 1684 she was allowed a fee of thirty pounds.

Edward Gray and Hannah (Susanna) Gray, her son and daughter, chose Captain Nathaniel Thomas as their Guardian, and Thomas, Rebecca, Lydia (Elizabeth) and Samuel chose Capt. Thomas and their mother as their guardians. The Court approved these nominations on July 1, 1684.² The widow waived her dower in the Pocasset and Puncatest lands, and the Court appointed one Samuel Sprague to represent her at the proprietors' meetings.³ Sprague lived in Marshfield and was the colonial Registrar or Recorder and Secretary of the General Court.

After Gray's death widow Anna married Nathaniel Clark, with whom she was much dissatisfied, and she complained to the Court in 1686 and asked divorcement. After repeated hearings and some expert testimony the Court "did not see cause to grant a divorce as desired" but the Court confirmed a property division.

I will here note that during the entire history of Plymouth Colony I find record of only six divorces. William Paybody, after the patriarchal style, gave William Tubbs a "writing of divorcement", but the Court treated the document as a nullity and fined Paybody and the witnesses. Yet divorces by declaration were common in Rhode Island till 1654 when it was ordered that in respect of several inconveniences that have happened no man sign any writing as a bill of divorce unless the separation be allowed by the colony. In Portsmouth a law provided that no man shall detain or harbor another's wife "after warning forbidding", under penalty of five pounds for every night of offendage. Rhode Island laws have ever continued to be quite liberal by comparison with those of the Massachusetts colonies.

From Davis' History of Plymouth we learn that the following were Edward Gray's children

By wife Mary (nee Winslow)

Desire, born 1651 (Married Nathaniel Southworth)

Mary, born 1653

Elizabeth, born 1658 (Married Seth Arnold)

¹ See VI-66

² See VI-141

³ See VI-97

} Ply. Col. Records

Sarah, born 1659, (Married Samuel Little)

John, born 1661

By Dorothy Lettis

Edward, born 1667

Susanna, born 1668 (Married John Cole)

Rebecca (Married Ephriam Cole)

Lydia (Married Caleb Loring)

He also had a son Samuel.

Nathaniel Thomas

The second-named proprietor in the grand deed and who owned a one-sixth interest in the whole was probably the junior of that name as is evidenced by the fact that when he was sworn in before James Cudworth, as clerk of the proprietors on July 7, 1681 (6-72) his age is given as about 37 years. This corresponds exactly with the birth date of Nathaniel Thomas Jr. who was born in 1643 and was the second son of Nathaniel Thomas Sr. who was born in 1606. Nathaniel Sr. came to Plymouth in 1637 from Yarmouth, England, with his father William, who was one of the original Merchant Adventurers of London, and they settled in Marshfield.

The elder Nathaniel was prominent politically, having been a member of the General Court for eight years, and having acted as Governor's Assistant for seven years. Goodwin says (p. 439) "he was scholarly and public spirited but illiberal in religious matters". He served as lieutenant during the Indian War and was stationed at the Mount Hope garrison with twenty men when Philip escaped from the Pocasset swamp; he was considered well to do and probably was financially interested in and perhaps personally owned the five shares which his son represented.

Benjamin Church

The third grantee named in the grand deed although holding the smallest proportion, was by far the most noted personage who resided in Bristol County in that age. Goodwin calls him the "Myles Standish of the second generation" and marvels that his descendants have not erected in his memory a worthy public monument. He was a fearless man, he understood the savages better than any other colonist, and his accomplishments during the Indian war, oftentimes either alone or accompanied only by a single companion, amount almost to the heroic. His ancestry and his home surroundings all combined to perfect a character which was in its inception fearless and commanding.

“The Entertaining History of King Philip’s War”, printed in 1716, was written by Thomas Church, son of Col. Benjamin Church, largely from the father’s dictation. It is the most noted of the publications relating to this period.

In 1630 when Gov. Edward Winslow was on his way to England, hoping to grasp that ever-elusive charter, — he was entertained by Boston gentry while waiting to take his ship, and he seems to have given assurance that Plymouth colony would be in harmony with the Bay Colony in excluding from its territory artisans whose departure from either colony had not been previously sanctioned. Skilled artisans were everywhere in great demand, and laws were in existence that they should not use their “science” for foreigners till home necessities had been served.

About this time Richard Church, the father of Benjamin, a carpenter — and John Phillips, an ancestor of the writer, — a millwright — had arrived in Plymouth, where Church was assisting in the planning and erection of the first regular church edifice, and as these men had come from Boston without permission, Governor Bradford was in effect rebuked by Governor Winthrop for harboring them. There was some unsatisfactory correspondence, and it soon became apparent that Church had other attractions in Plymouth than his trade, for he wooed and wed Elizabeth Warren, a daughter of Richard Warren, the pilgrim. Richard Warren was a military leader, and his two sons and five daughters were prominent and fearless men and women. They all married into prominent families and for generations their descendants were numbered among the brave men of the colony.

Benjamin was born in 1639, grew up in his father’s trade as a carpenter, and allied himself in marriage to the martial family of Southworth, his wife being Alice, daughter of Constant Southworth and granddaughter of Alice Bradford. His first home was in Plymouth, but in 1670 he was listed as a freeman in Duxbury and in the following year was elected a constable there. From 1668 to 1673 he served five terms as a juryman. In the autumn of 1674 Church moved to his new home at Sakonet. He had purchased this estate at the suggestion of Capt. John Almy and erected two buildings on it before the war. The site is still owned by his descendants. Seventeen days before the beginning of the Indian war, viz: on June 7, 1675, Church was in Rhode Island and was there told by Weetamoe and some of her men that Philip intended a war speedily and some of them said they would help him (Vol. X, p. 363).

At the beginning of the war Church was an inferior officer and when reinforcements had arrived and the troops under command of his superior officers had driven the Indians into the Mt. Hope peninsula, whence they had escaped across the bay to Pocasset, Church managed to have two brisk skirmishes and to drive them into the Pocasset swamp. The main body then coming up an attack was made, but it was not followed up, and while they were striving to starve out the Indians it was found that the fighting men had escaped up the Taunton River on rude rafts, leaving the squaws and children to the philanthropy of the whites. Church was so disgusted that he withdrew from the war, only to return seven months later as a volunteer aide to Gov. Josiah Winslow who had been placed in command of the confederated forces. In an engagement which followed, Church received three wounds, one of which was severe. Later Church was sent for, but his request for entire freedom of action was deemed unreasonable, and he returned in bad humor to Rhode Island, but again feeling rebuked by inaction while his friends were in peril he returned to Plymouth and was given a captain's commission with some discretionary powers.

Without waiting for the sixty English and 140 Indian followers which he was to raise, Church then went entirely alone into the hostile Sakonet camp and called upon the warriors to renounce Philip and to take the war path against him. A violent scene followed in which Church's personal magnetism alone saved his life, but finally his call was accepted and he was soon on the enemies' trail, and it was a hunting trip rather than a war with many prisoners taken, some of whom quickly became devoted to Church and enlisted against their own, often on the very day they were taken. Within three months Philip was surrounded at Mount Hope, and shot by a Sakonet Indian. Leading white men who were then in Church's little company included Lt. Jabez Howland, son of the first John of the Mayflower; Nathaniel Southworth, husband of a daughter of Edward Gray, was a cousin of Church's wife; Jacob Cook was grandson of the 1st Francis of the Mayflower and his uncle was married to Church's aunt; Jonathan Delano also was married to Mary Warren, Church's first cousin. It seems almost like a family party. A little later the war ended in the capture of Anawan, Philip's captain who had probably been the real leader of the war. This was accomplished at the Anawan rock in Rehoboth by Church and Cook and six friendly Indians, who by their audacity overcame a body of sixty Indian warriors. On November 4, 1676 (XI, 242) the

Court confirmed Church's engagement not to deport certain Indians who had "carried well", but one who had committed murder was excepted.

Church's home in Sakonet was destroyed during the war and at its close he settled temporarily in Bristol. He was a selectman there in 1682 and 1686, and was Deputy from Bristol to the General Court in 1682, 3 and 4. In July and October 1683 (VII, 263 and 270) Church was defendant in the suit of one Saffin for damage caused by his damming a tide-way between Bristol and Popasquash Neck, and was, after one verdict of "not proven", finally obligated to pay three pounds damage. In July 1681 (VI, 69), he was authorized to cut a road from Bristol through colony lands to make a more direct road to Plymouth. In 1682 having sold three Indians into slavery, the Court approved a composition for their freedom. (At this period a sale "to slavery" within the colony meant little more than an enforced apprenticeship).

In 1689 Church was named commander in chief of the expedition against the eastern Indians and in 1690 (VI, 256) the Court agreed that he might divide his plunder equally between his English and his Indian soldiers. In 1682 Church as Commissioner took the testimony for the Court in the depositions relating to Hog Island ("Chessawanucke"). (VII, 257).

About 1700 Church built a house on the second lot of the freeman's purchase, i. e. north of Pine street in Fall River. He died on January 17th A. D. 1718, aged seventy-eight years; his family consisted of five sons and one daughter, and their descendants are a legion in our midst.

Church's death was due to a hemorrhage, caused by a fall from his horse; he had grown to be very corpulent, and when he was returning from his sister's home (Mrs. Irish) his horse stumbled and he was thrown forward with great violence. His children were

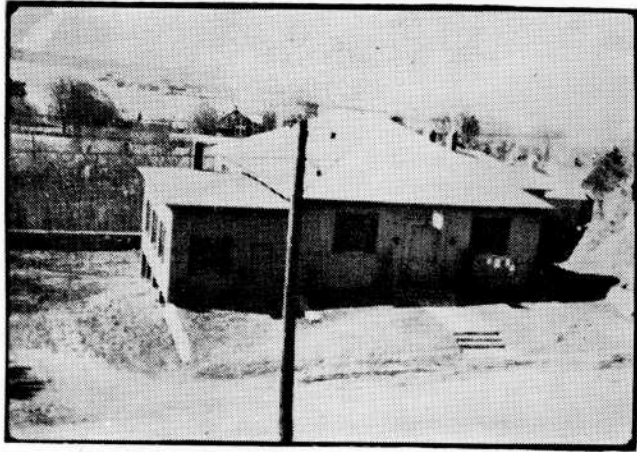
1. Thomas Church (father of Thomas Church, Esq.).
2. Capt. Constant Church.
3. Benjamin Church ("he died unmarried").
4. Edward Church ("father of Deacon Benjamin Church").
5. Charles Church.

The daughter was Mrs. Tothbotham.

In memory of Benjamin Church I quote Fowler "of all the English who bore commands during the great Indian war, none was so much feared, so much respected, and finally so much beloved by them, as this terrible and triumphant enemy. In conducting such wars, he was unrivalled; though many have acquired much reputation for their skill in managing



COL. BENJAMIN CHURCH.



Tiverton Town Hall



John T. Cook House, Tiverton, R. I.

and fighting Indians, none have exhibited a genius or aptitude equal to Church”.

Capt. Christopher Almy

Captain Christopher Almy, the fourth named grantee in the Pocasset deed and Job Almy the fifth, were both residents of Portsmouth but Christopher later removed to Newport. The Society of Colonial Wars recognizes both as patriotic ancestors, entitling their descendants to membership. Christopher was born in 1632 and died in 1713. He became a freeman in 1658 and was Deputy from Portsmouth in 1689, 1690 and 1691 and Assistant to Gov. Andros in 1690 while also serving at home as member of the town council and assessor. He was elected Governor in 1693 but refused to serve; was made captain and messenger to England from Rhode Island in 1692. He had a son of the same name who was admitted a freeman in 1697, and he also had a son Job, called in the records, Job the son of Christopher, or Job of Newport. Christopher's land in Portsmouth ran from the main road to the seaside next south of land of Richard Borden. He owned three and three quarter lots in the Pocasset purchase, and before the division of lots acquired a quarter from Job Almy. He drew in the allotment the 7th, 9th, 17th and 28th lots. Christopher Almy sold the 9th lot to John Cook of Portsmouth, R. I. whence comes the name of Cook Pond. It is now called Laurel Lake. Its southerly end is at the State line.

Christopher Almy was one of the eight persons, John Borden being another, who were nominated on March 2, 1688 to go to Boston to put forth the claims and rights of the town of Portsmouth as opposing the petition of Capt. Thomas Townsend for certain lands at Hog Island. Christopher was given four pounds of the money “gathered for the use” and John Borden had twenty shillings.

Job Almy

Job Almy, the fifth grantee, was proposed as a freeman in Portsmouth in June 1683. He was not the Captain Job Almy who was a member of the Governor's Council in 1709 and Deputy from 1709 to 1726. He also owned three and three quarter shares, but having sold a quarter to Christopher, his allotment covered the 11th, 18th and one-half of the 24th lot. Job Almy deceased prior to 1692 and willed his lots to his son Job Almy. (See deed of April 4, 1692, book 2, page 36). In the records this second Job of the second generation was usually called Job the son of Job.

The eleventh lot covers the present location of the Shove Mill and runs to a point fifty-two rods southerly of the State Line; the intervening land being lot twelve which was allotted to Edward Gray.

Job Almy died very shortly after the first Pocasset Division was made, and his widow, Mary, the executrix of his will, married Thomas Townsend. The will gave her half of his Pocasset lands. The Townsends lived on the tenth lot. From deeds which are recorded we learn that Job Almy left two sons John and Job Jr. and three daughters, Mary, wife of Samuel Snell, Deborah Hix and Katherine Townsend. One of the proprietors of the former "Fall River News" claims descent through the two Job Almys.

Thomas Waite, Jr.

Thomas Waite, the senior of that name, was one of the original settlers in Portsmouth and was assigned a house lot there in 1639. In 1646 he was granted thirty acres of land between the head of wading river and the Newport path (i. e. north of Island Park). In 1651 he brought in five fox heads and was paid the usual bounty. He was constable in 1658.

Thomas Waite, Jr. is doubtless the sixth Pocasset purchaser. He was admitted a freeman in Portsmouth in 1671, was on the jury in 1674. The year of the Pocasset sale he was elected constable in Portsmouth but declined to serve and he apparently moved to Pocasset, his great lot was located approximately at Manchester's switch. He had only one share.

Daniel Wilcox

The junior of that name was the Pocasset purchaser. He owned two shares, — he disposed of one share prior to the first division so that only one lot (viz; lot 10) was then drawn for him, but he bought another share, viz: the 25th share of Edward Gray, which was deeded to him by Thomas Gray (Edward's son) under date of April 4, 1699, (book 2, page 423). His father Daniel Wilcox had been one of the early residents of Portsmouth. He was a member of the inquest there in 1642, and bought and sold lands there from 1657 to 1686. He also owned land in Dartmouth as early as 1685 (See V, 293). His grandfather, Edward Wilcox, was in Portsmouth as early as February 13, 1660.

The son was also at one time a resident of Dartmouth for he was town constable there in 1665 (IV, 91). He married Elizabeth, a daughter of John and Sarah Cook. John Cook and his father Francis Cook were both Mayflower passengers, as also was Sarah's father Richard Warren. Sarah Cook's sister married Richard Church in 1636. Wilcox was there-

fore a cousin by marriage to Capt. Benjamin Church. He had acquired great proficiency in speaking the Indian language (Dexter's "Church", p. 22).

In 1668 (IV, 175) it was deemed advisable to establish a ferry on the Pocasset side to transport passengers to Rhode Island. John Cook and other neighbors of Dartmouth were authorized by legislative act to engage a ferryman and to allow such to build a small structure there and improve some land "with the consent of the Indians."

Cook lived to a ripe old age (till 1694). Mary Allerton Cushman alone of all the Mayflower passengers survived him. He was for many years (Goodwin, p. 475) deacon of the church, and was ten times a deputy to the general Court at Plymouth, but in the Quaker troubles he opposed the Prence regime and was excommunicated. He then became a pioneer settler both at Lakeville and Dartmouth, and the number of his descendants in this vicinity is very large. After his excommunication he attended the Holmes' Baptist Church in Newport, and his interest in a ferry was personal, as it was used in his weekly pilgrimage from Dartmouth to Newport.

Jacob Cook, John's nephew, also a cousin both to Wilcox and to Capt. Benjamin Church, was the sole companion of the latter when they captured Philip's chief warrior-captain (Anawan) with his entire Indian band, as they were in flight from Mount Hope after the death of Philip. This was the final event of the Indian war.

In 1668 Wilcox took the oath of fidelity to Plymouth Colony (IV, 175) and later in the same year Cook and Wilcox were authorized to let the ferry, as a result of which on July 5, 1669 Ralph Allen was granted liberty to keep the ferry and to transport passengers to and from "Rhode Island and the maine" and also to purchase a hundred acres of land from the Indians on condition that he pay ten pounds to the colony.

The Plymouth laws were very strict with reference to the purchase of lands from the Indians,—express authority from the Court being required, and a Colonial deed alone confirmed the purchase. This differed from the Rhode Island laws, for there the Indians were regarded as sole owners of the land, with full authority to convey the same at their pleasure. Wilcox doubtless knew the law but he disregarded it, and on June 23, 1683 by deed recorded in book 1 at page 346, he took a deed from Mamanuwot, Chief Sachem of "Seconet" which conveyed a hundred acres of land bounded easterly by the Dartmouth (now the Westport) line, and partly with the river, southerly by the spring called "Semsuet", and easterly from that spring to "salt river", and to "Alderman's land". The consideration

named is "many and great courtesies of several years continuance in the time of my distress and wants, which did amount to the value of near two hundred pounds or thereabouts and myself not knowing how to satisfy him but in land".

For procuring this deed Wilcox was in 1686 (VI, 202) indicted in Plymouth and bound over in five hundred pounds to appear before the Court of Assistants to answer a presentment for purchasing the lands of an indian contrary to law.

Wilcox was again before the Court in June 1690 for making tumultuous opposition to the laying out of two hundred acres of land at Sakonet to one Thomas Hinckley "for his war services and expense", and in October of the same year was again before the Court to answer for "contumelious speeches and carriages concerning the present authority".

Then came the union of the colonies and in 1693 at the August term of the Superior Court of Judicative in Bristol, Wilcox was tried, convicted of high misdemeanors and fined one hundred and fifty pounds. He escaped from the sheriff and took refuge with his friends in Portsmouth beyond the jurisdiction of the Court. This presented an international episode (Dexter's Church, p. 21) but Rhode Island refused to deliver him up for punishment.

Wilcox's family had lived in Little Compton but by March 1701 they had removed to Tiverton, and Capt. Church presented a petition to the General Court of Massachusetts (See the State Archives, Vol. 40, p. 669) praying that an act be passed, allowing the conveyance to the state by Wilcox of his interest in certain Pocasset lands in satisfaction of his fine (Dubuque's Indian Reservation, page 24) and that he be allowed to go home to his distressed family. The act was passed and Wilcox conveyed to the Commonwealth on November 27, 1701 lot numbered 14 of the six score acre lots, being the lot lying between Stafford Road (with a frontage of 840 feet on that road) and the South Watuppa Pond, and which is next southerly of the present Rhode Island state line, also lot numbered 2 of the forty acre lots, being a lot easterly of North Watuppa pond, almost opposite the pumping station, and the second lot southerly from the then Freetown line, and also a whole share, being the 25th in number, of the undivided Pocasset lands.

Ebenezer Brenton, Benjamin Church and Wm. Paybodie were the Committee of the General Court to receive the conveyance, and, when taken, title was held by them in trust for the Indians (see book 1, page 243). The friendly Indians of the Pocasset tribe, i. e. those who had served under the English in the Indian War, were settled upon these two lots, and

Captain Church was their guardian or trustee, receiving from the proprietors the later distributions of Pocasset funds for their benefit.

The Indians however were dissatisfied with their reservations, and later petitioned the Court that their holdings be consolidated (Mass. Archives, Vol. 31, p. 15) in order that they might have a common school and a common place for public worship. Their prayer was granted, and Capt. Church took over this share of Pocasset lands and in exchange granted them lands which he owned in the Freetown purchase,⁴ and this is the story of the origin and establishment of the Indian Reservation in Copicut.

William Manchester

William Manchester, the eighth and last of the Pocasset purchasers, came from Portsmouth. A William Manchester was admitted there as a freeman in 1675, but our William Manchester is described in the Pocasset deed as a resident of Puncatest so that he probably moved there when the war had ended. He owned five Pocasset shares, but sold three of them prior to the first division of lands, as only two (the third and fifth) of the great lots were assigned to him. Manchester also owned one share (a fifteenth) in the Puncatest lands, and he resided in Puncatest as late as July 1710.

In 1709 he was on the committee created by the Puncatest and Seconet proprietors to build a "water mill", probably a predecessor of the "Awa-shunk's" Mill now owned by J. Edward Newton.

Between May 20th, 1680 (the date of the grand deed) and April 11, 1681 (the date of the first division of lands) certain changes in ownership interests occurred, viz:

1. Job Almy sold a quarter share to Christopher Almy and a half share to Robert Hazard.⁵ This left Christopher Almy as owner of four shares, Job Almy as owner of two, and Almy (Job) and Hazard as partners in a single share. Hazard was a Portsmouth man.
2. Nathaniel Thomas sold two shares to John Cook of Portsmouth, so that he remained the owner of three shares.
3. Daniel Wilcox sold one of his two shares to Jacob Mott, and
4. William Manchester sold three of his five shares, one to Edward

⁴ See deed Benj. Church of Tiverton to Jos. Dudley, Present Gov. of Province of Mass. Bay.

"Lot No. 14 — (6 score acre lot) being part of his 2d and 3d great lots"

"in Easterly part of Freetown — 1¼ miles long and 64 rods wide,"

"bounded westerly on Great Watuppa Pond" Date Apr 4/1709 book 2 page 140.

also deed Apr 4/1709 — book 2 p. 143.

Joseph Dudley — to Benjamin Church.

⁵ See deed Feb 17/1681 — book 2 p 437 — Fall River Copied Records.

Wanton, one to Gideon Freeborn and one to William Corey. These three men also were from Portsmouth.

In the first division —

Edward Gray drew lots 1, 2, 4, 8, 12, 15, 25, 26 and 30	9
William Manchester drew lots 3 and 5	2
Benjamin Church drew lot 6	1
Christopher Almy drew lots 7, 9, 17 and 28	4
Daniel Wilcox drew lot 10	1
Job Almy drew lots 11 and 18	2
Jacob Mott drew lot 13	1
Nathaniel Thomas drew lots 14, 27 and 29	3
Gideon Freeborn drew lot 20	1
John Cook drew lots 16 and 19	2
Edward Wanton drew lot 21	1
William Cory drew lot 22	1
Thomas Waite drew lot 23	1
Job Almy and Robert Hazard drew lot 24	1
	30

Each of the lots in this Division was bounded easterly by the Eight Rod Way (or Plymouth Avenue); westerly by the Bay, and northerly by the lot which bore the next lower number.