

ROBERT ROYCE (1669-1759)

MARY PORTER (1677-1759)

Robert Royce was the first child born to Samuel and Hannah (Churchill) Royce.(1-2) He was a grandson of Robert Royce, (1-1) the immigrant ancestor and early settler of Stratford and New London, Connecticut. On the records of Wallingford, Connecticut, Robert, son of Samuel, was often referred to as Robert, Sr., even though his grandfather and an uncle had the name of Robert. Younger members of the several Royce families in the Wallingford area had also been given the name of Robert.

"Robert Royce was born, January 29, 1669, in New London, Conn., and was married to Mary Porter June 2, 1692. He died April 2, 1759." 1

"Mary Porter was born February 28, 1677, at Stratford, Conn., and died March 11, 1759." 2

Mary Royce Beach, in compiling information of Beach and related families states similar data:

"Mary Porter, b. at Stratford, 28 Feb. 1677, married Robert Royce, who was born 29 January, 1669/70 called Deacon of the Meriden Church, who died 2 April 1759." 3

Her (Mary's) father was "Nathaniel Porter (3-3) Windsor, Conn. probably born in America. In 1669, he was listed among the Freemen of Stratford. His first wife was Hannah, daughter of Philip Groves, and upon her death he married Elizabeth, her sister. He died, January, 1680." 4

In the same write-up it is stated that Mary's grandfather, "John Porter (3-2) was born, 1590. He came from England probably in 1638. He received a large land grant and was Constable at Windsor, Connecticut, 1639; Deputy to the Genrral Court, 1639, et seq. In 1620, he married Anna White of England. He died, 1648." 5

The vital statistics of Wallingford, Connecticut, Vol. I page 158, records that Robert Royce and Mary Porter were married June 2, 1692, in Wallingford by Mr. Moss.

In noting details of record, Robert's mother, Hannah (Churchill) Royce died when he was 20 years of age and two years following his father's second marriage to Sarah Baldwin in 1690, he and Mary were married. Mary's father died when she was only a baby of 3 years, the youngest of seven children. Her mother died three years later and so the children were left to be reared by others. It is a likely assumption that Mary, if not all of the children, found themselves living among relatives in Windsor, the former home of their father, or in areas even closer to Meriden, a settlement to the north of Wallingford, where the Royce family resided.

The home and farm of Robert and Mary lay in the same area as all the Royce farms and near his father's home place. Its west portion lay just south of the Falls Plain Division in the Hanover Area. The east portion lay on the east of the Quinnipiac River not far from the old road to Wallingford. (See Map #13)

Since 1806, when the town line of Wallingford was placed more to the south, Robert's farm would actually be in what is now Meriden. During the years of

Robert and Mary's occupancy, they were regarded as a part of Wallingford, though it was being considered Meriden long before Wallingford relinquished its rights to the area and Meriden was finally incorporated.

All that part of Meriden lying to the north of Wallingford was for many years in Hartford County and, in turn, jurisdiction was claimed by several areas, including the Colonial Court, Wethersfield, Farmington, Middletown and Wallingford, and records of very early purchases of real estate must be searched from hither to thither--one can never be sure where. With such a complexity of jurisdiction, we are lucky to have the Meriden map of 1770, referred to above. It becomes further confusing to realize that Meriden was also a point of contention between the two larger governing centers of Hartford and New Haven during the period before Hartford was made the seat of the central government of Connecticut. Here, then, were two rival colonies only thirty-six miles apart, but as widely separated as the poles in methods and theories of government. Just half way between was the territory of Meriden, a buffer, as it were, between two rival-pushing bands of land-hungry Englishmen.

It was here in this town of broken local government and complex jurisdiction that the Royces lived for several generations. No doubt there still remains some of the Royce descendants in and around Meriden. It was not until Robert and Mary's grandson, Titus Rice, left (abt. 1772) for Berkshire County in Western Massachusetts, that the line of ancestry, of which this study is concerned, left the home grounds of the beautiful area of Meriden; the town that represents the place where the Royces, sons of the immigrant, built their hearth-stones and homes after leaving the settlement of New London, Conn.

George Munson Curtis speaks out for those early settlers, as if to explain the situation more fully and lend a measure of appreciation for the town of Meriden and its surroundings. These words are recorded in "Meriden's Early History".

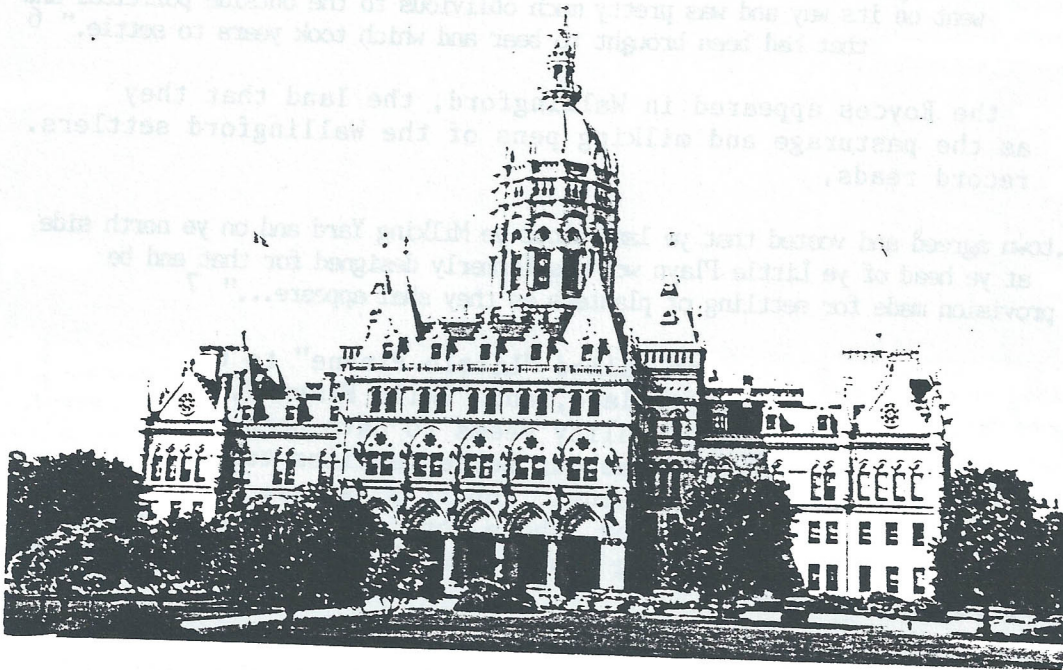
"We may not have a continuous town history, but our homes have been laid in a country of lovely hills and vales, and our eyes are daily confronted by as beautiful a landscape as can be found in Connecticut and those who have not been neglectful of the beauties that surround us love every inch of her rugged cliffs, brawling brooks, woodland paths and smiling cultivated meadows, swelling and sinking in every changing vistas of loveliness.

"It will assist one to better understand and appreciate our early annals if, on a bright and clear day in summer, a climb is made to the summit of West Peak, or better still, to the grey tower known as Castle Crag, standing on the verge of the dizzy cliff that, like a sentinel, dominates all the landscape to the west of Meriden.

"In a vast panorama spreads the valley to the north and south, dotted with ponds, lakes, meadows, woodland and villages, and checked on the east by mountains and crags which distance clothes in a purple haze, half veiling the ruggedness of grim old Lamentation, Higby and Beseck, torn and rent by the storms and frosts of ages. Like a map, the country lies below us, for we are more than a thousand feet above the sea.

"Away in the north gleams the gilded dome of the Capitol in the gentle depression which holds in its lap Hartford, Windsor and Wethersfield, washed on the east by the waters of the Connecticut River and swelling in the west into the wooded slopes of Talcott Mountain, while further south and west the spreading waves of pioneer life extended the colony into

the valley of the Farmington River...



Connecticut's Capitol Building at Hartford
Completed in 1880

"On the borders of Berlin and Meriden gleams like a spot of burnished silver a large lake or pond, but in those days of long ago, no pond would have met our eyes, but instead a vast morass or swamp alive with beavers and water fowl and curiously called by the old Dutch name of the Fly or Uly. Just south of this swamp was cleared the first settlement in the territory of Meriden...Just at the foot of the steep side of the most eastern of the parallel ridges close at hand, Cold Spring pours forth its ice cold water. The fame of Cold Spring was once so great that it lent its name to localize all the territory for at least two miles to the north, east and south.

"On the southeast, beyond Wallingford, the range of Lamentation and Beseck Mountains stretches the bold front of its trap-rock cliffs into the town of Branford, while towards the south on the horizon, rise the sharp hills known as East and West Rocks, and over their summits we catch glimpses of Long Island Sound, indenting the land in a little bay where the Quinnipiac river, winding quietly through the southern valley, finally pours its waters, gathered from the hills and meadows of Bristol, Southington, Meriden, Cheshire, Wallingford and North Haven. New Haven, we cannot see, for East Rock, capped by the monument erected in memory of the dead of the Civil War, hides and shelters it from the north.

"It is an historic, as well as a beautiful, panorama on which we are gazing and students and historians have many times told the story of the settlements of Hartford and New Haven and the contention of both to win lands that would make them the centers of independent territories. Meriden's earliest settlement bordered on these lines of

contention and its history depended largely on the relations of these two rivals.

"To the settlers and farmers of Meriden, the strife of these two colonies, one to the North at Hartford, and one to the south in New Haven, was of little interest and life in the community went on its way and was pretty much oblivious to the outside political and economic pressures that had been brought to bear and which took years to settle." ⁶

Before the Royces appeared in Wallingford, the land that they acquired had been used as the pasturage and milking pens of the Wallingford settlers. In 1679, the record reads,

"...town agreed and voated that ye land about ye Milking Yard and on ye north side ye broke at ye head of ye Little Playn wch was formerly designed for that end be viewed and provision made for settling of planters as they shal appeare..." ⁷

This milking yard plain was called "Little Playne" to distinguish it from the "Great Playne" west of the village, and "Falls Playne". As stated by the author, George M. Curtis, this locality seems to have been particularly desirable and several members of the numerous Royce families took grants of land property in this area, including Samuel, Robert's father. Robert had three Royce uncles, brothers of his father, whose sons occupied portions as well, and these farms were situated along "Colony Road". The district became known as "Royce's Farms". (Map #10)

"No part of Meriden seems to have been regarded so favorably by the pioneers of that day, as the territory now known as Hanover, or South Meriden". ⁸

Robert was blessed, indeed, for having been settled in so favorable a spot as that which had been selected by his father, Samuel.

"The land was fertile and some of the most profitable farms in Meriden were located in this territory. It was so called, even down to the foot of the hills east of Cheshire Street." ⁹

Robert was considered a man of means in terms of land property and home buildings. We can conclude that his family of thirteen children were well provided for and their environment would compare with the best to be had for that time and place. Robert was called Deacon Robert Royce as he served faithfully at his post in the Meriden Church. He and Mary were people of high moral character and their children had the advantage of standards of value.

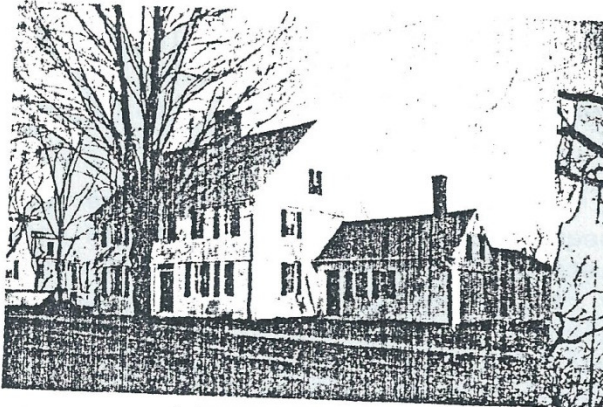
Julia M. Roys had this to say regarding Robert:

"Robert Roys lived in the south-eastern part of Meriden and was one of the first deacons of the first church in the town, elected December 14, 1729.

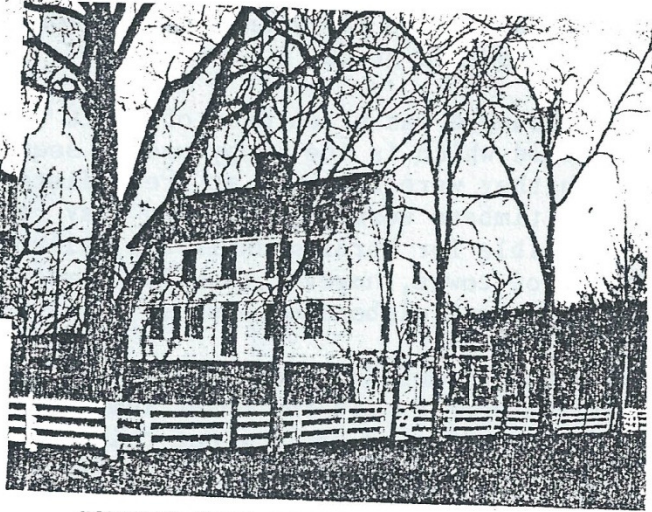
"This item is in one of the old records: 'December 18, 1716 the town voted that Robert Roys should sett in ye fore seat in ye meeting house'. (Wallingford Church Record)." ¹⁰

We see from such statements of record that Robert and his family were people who had a sacred reverence for deity and honored the Sabbath Day as a day of rest. Their social life must have centered around that early meeting house as was the custom of the time. Quiltings, weddings, funerals, occasional political doings, all brought people together for serious

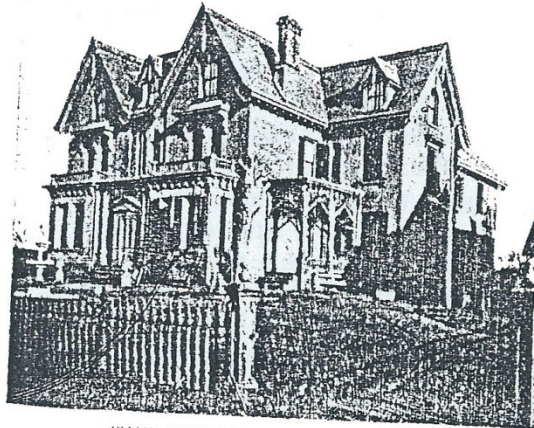
The homes of Robert's time were large, substantial, and handsome. Some of the early homes have been preserved in Meriden, including the home of Nehemiah Royce, Robert's uncle, shown in Samuel's story (1-2). Photos of other homes preserved and still being occupied today are seen below.



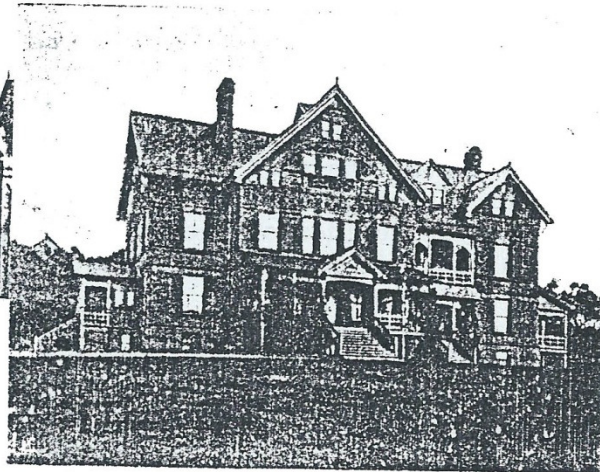
A CURTIS HOMESTEAD.



BOYHOOD HOME OF GENERAL HENRY BENHAM.



THE LEMUEL J. CURTIS PLACE.



THE CURTIS HOME.

and simple social activities. Schools were hit and miss affairs and ingenuity and practical experience played the major role of education.

Plowing their cleared land was largely a matter between the farmer and his sons and five of Robert's fourteen children were sons. Hand plows needed two to handle the plow and the oxen. Agricultural implements still included the crude plow and harrow and tools such as the broad axe, used to cut logs into square beams; grub and weed hoe; pitchfork, scythe, wooden ox yokes, single trees for yoking two oxen together and many hand made articles were still made and saved for the next generation. These are a few of the necessary items needed to carry on the farm work and to build fences, sheds and barns for the live stock.

Kitchenware was often made of fruit woods. Bowls and dippers were made of burl wood which is the lumpy masses seen on trees. Saw mills were in use but often they were situated at great distances apart. The forests with their prevalent timbers were still within easy range and firewood for fireplaces was accessible for burning until the railroads came to furnish coal. Within the areas of towns, however, sawmill lumber was becoming available for the building of more elaborate houses.

Several of Meriden's early homes built of hewn logs still graced the large fireplaces as did the newer lumber homes built during Robert and Mary's time. They still had their great chimneys, brick ovens, and stone hearths, worn by the big iron bean-porridge pots, and the long legged skillets. The days of the great brown loaves of bread baked in the brick oven, and buttermilk shortcakes done on griddles over the fire, were to continue in use even as the frontiersmen moved westward during the 1800s.

The log homes that were built earlier in Meriden were replaced soon by substantial lumber mansions of great beauty, some few of which have lasted and been preserved and in use until today. No record or tradition favor the notion that log houses were being built in Robert's day even though there were some remaining to be lived in. Meriden was a prosperous area and saw-mills were soon put into use as were many other innovative and enterprising industries. It is probable that in most instances the homes that replaced the log huts and dotted the area by Robert's time compared favorably with the elegant edifices being built in Hartford, New Haven and even Boston. Robert no doubt, was the builder of the house shown on page 55, as suggested in his son Gideon's story (1-4).

"As the houses decayed, closets became receptacles for rubbish. Often in later times, the wrecks of discarded furniture, old snow shoes and moth-eaten buff caps, broken utensils, and sometimes books and papers, discolored, tattered, and nibbled, have been dragged from these dusty reservoirs.

"Among articles of furniture distinctively belonging to Robert's time we may notice the high chest of drawers, reaching nearly from floor to ceiling, with its multitude of drawers graded in size from a button box almost to a trunk. . . . After a time, as wealth increased, the great house-clock, with its radiant, moonlike face, made its appearance in a few homes. In the kitchen, the high wooden settle was never absent, - now used as a screen, and now receding to the wall to give full exhibition to that grand receptacle of cheering coals and flame, the wide-mouthed fireplace." 11

The nearest way from the old Meriden town center to the settlement at "Fall Plain" (South Meriden), was partly by a road which led over "Holt Hill", and partly by a footpath which traversed a field and a hillside famous for blackberries, and thence through a grove of hickory trees. Holt Hill has since been cut to accommodate the Hartford and New Haven railroad. The footpath led close by the "copper-mine pits". These copper mines seemed to have given promise but whether the ore gave out or faith and patience were lacking, cannot be known. It was once said that Connecticut was rich in ores, but they lay so deep that mining for them would never pay. The old field and blackberry patch is now "Walnut Grove Cemetery" and a road with dwellings on each side now crosses the lonely hill where the first settlers built their first place of public worship and buried their dead.

In early days there was no vehicle other than a most primitive ox cart to be found on the streets of New England towns. Short distances were made on horseback or on foot. The dead of Meriden were laid to rest in an unlined elmwood coffin, with its hard suggestive outlines and, as was the custom then, borne on the shoulders of men, for the office of bearer was then a literal one, to the burial ground.

Manufacturing was an important occupation of the area. Tin-ware, combs and coffee mills, as well as brass and wooden combs, were made. The nucleus of the present immense trade in silverware was in a small shop in Meriden. Wood was the only fuel in early New England settlements before railroads came in to deliver coal.

Sunday was a day of rest for everybody but the minister who must preach two sermons never preached before, superintend the noon Sunday-school, conduct a Bible class at the close of the day and open the evening prayer-meeting. All respectable families went to church at which the singing of hymns was a very usual feature.

Schools for the children were held only as provided when the local citizenry gave their support, but usually only lasted for three or four months of the year, and then only as someone qualified could be had. The job usually fell upon a conscientious and charitable minister of the church. 12

The children of Robert and Mary were found recorded in five different sources, namely; Wallingford Records, the Parish records of Meriden's first church, the "History of Wallingford", The 'Roys Family Record' written in 1909, by Miss Julia M. Roys of Berlin, Conn., "Families of Ancient New Haven", Vol. 7, pp. 1555-1557. The material given in these sources were combined to make a more complete record for this writing:

1. Nathaniel Royce, b. 21 Oct. 1693, died soon.
2. Nathaniel Royce, b. 22 Oct. 1694, died Nov. 26, 1760, Sgt; md. Dec. 27, 1720, Phebe, dau. of Ebenezer and Elizabeth (Parker) Clark, b. May 20, 1703
3. Dinah Royce, b. Feb. 24, 1696, died Apr. 13, 1732; md. June 11, 1718 to David Sherman
4. Josiah Royce, b. July 10, 1698, died 1735; md. May 1, 1722 to Abigail, dau. of Ebenezer and Elizabeth (Parker) Clark, b. June 8, 1705; she md. (2) 1736 - John Prout of Middletown, Conn.

5. Ruth Royce, b. Sept. 1701, died Feb. 2, 1775; md. June 8, 1720 to Amos Hall. One record stated the marriage was Jan. 28, 1720.
6. Sarah Royce, b. April 4, 1703, died April or (Aug.), 1703 or (1723)
7. Timothy Royce, b. June 2 or 5, 1705, died May 2, 1737; md. May 16, 1727 to Mindwell, dau. of Ephraim and Mindwell Waples, b. about 1707, died Oct. 15, 1748
8. Mary Royce, b. July 1707, died Sept. 1799, ae. 93; md. (1) Feb. 22, 1727 - John Beach; (2) Jan. 19, 1732 - John Austin
9. Elizabeth Royce, b. Aug. 1709; md. (1) Dec. 21, 1726 - Jacob Hall; md. (2) - John Andrews
10. Gideon Royce, b. May 4, 1711, died Jan. 30, 1761; md. (1) Oct. 4, 1742 W.V. (7 Oct. by church records) to Mary Dutton, dau. of David and Lydia (Cook) Dutton, b. July 16, 1723; died May 2, 1746; md. (2) March 25, 1747, Rebecca, dau. of Reuben and Mary (Dayton) Johnson, widow of Wait Abernathy, b. July 14, 1723, died May 13, 1811, ae. 88; she md. (3) Feb. 24, 1763 - Joseph Cole
11. Prudence Royce, b. Apr. 11, 1714, died Feb. 7, 1746/7; md. April 25, 1733 - Timothy Gaylord
12. Moses Royce, b. Sep. 24, 1716, died Oct. 26, 1799, ae. 84, Capt.; md. (1) Jan. 6, 1740 - Thankful, dau. of John and Prudence (Royce) Austin, b. July 10, 1715, died Dec. 26, 1784, ae. 70; md. (2) Nov. 17, 1783 to Kezia, widow of Dr. Isaac Lewis
13. Martha Royce, md. March 16, 1730 to Edmund Scott
14. Lydia Royce, b. Nov. 20, 1719

(These last two were not listed in either the "Families of Ancient New Haven" or the Julia M. Roys writing.)¹³

It would seem that all but perhaps three - Nathaniel, Sarah and Lydia, lived to be married. Eleven children to reach maturity and noticeably several lived to a very old age.

Robert Royce died April 2, 1759, at the age of 90, just three weeks after his wife, Mary, died March 11, 1759, age 82. It is most likely that their grave sites are in the rear of the old Meriden Church where Robert had served as Deacon. The only Royce or Rice markers that are evident are the two mentioned in Samuel's story (1-2), and the old church has long since given way to newer structures. Though we can be sure the old church yard held the remains of many of the Royce families, it is sad to walk the grounds and not find any of their markers.

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| 1. #15, p.69 | 9. ibid |
| #7 p.237 | 10. #14 p.6 |
| 2. #15, p.95 | 11. #108 pp. 75-77 |
| 3. #13 p.13 | 12. ibid |
| 4. #15, p.68 | 13. #7 p.893 |
| 5. ibid | #14 pp. 5-6 |
| 6. #123 pp. 5-7 | #3 pp. 1555-7 |
| 7. ibid p.64 | #170, p.(1-3) |
| 8. ibid p.65 | |