

NATHANIEL PORTER (1640-1680)

ELIZABETH GROVES (-1683)

A brief statement about Nathaniel Porter is made by Alma Lewis James, in these words:

"Nathaniel Porter of Windsor, Conn., was probably born in America. In 1669, he was listed among the Freemen of Stratford, Conn. His first wife (md. 1664), was Hannah, daughter of Philip Groves, and upon her death, he married (1673) Elizabeth, her sister. He died, January, 1680." ¹

Another source gives information to the effect that Nathaniel was born 19 July, 1640, at Windsor, Connecticut. He was married to Elizabeth Groves, second wife, daughter of Philip and Anna (Hawley) Groves, of Stratford, Conn., in 1675. Nathaniel died in 1680 and Elizabeth died 6 February, 1683. ²

We can be sure that Nathaniel's birthplace was Windsor because his father and mother, John and Anna (White) Porter, were among the earliest settlers there in 1635. They were immigrants from Essex, England, and had first settled in Dorchester (now Milton) Massachusetts. When that area seemed inadequate to accommodate the many immigrants who were constantly arriving in the Boston Harbor with designs for new homes, the Porter's were among those who moved into the interior to find space and opportunities. The bravery and determination of those English people who were not accustomed to the rigors of frontier life and who had so recently arrived from their well established homeland, is of such magnitude that we, today, find it difficult to realize the hardships they faced and the problems that confronted them in a new and wild country. Nathaniel's parents, like many others of their day, risked their very lives when they crossed the wilderness between Boston, Mass., and Hartford, Conn., to found the new settlement they named Windsor. (Map #23)

Nathaniel grew to manhood in the early settlement years of Windsor, Connecticut. It is not known when he chose to make his home in Stratford, a settlement to the south on the shore of the Long Island Sound. Other families who had migrated to the interior, as had the Porters, moved on to Stratford and other coastal settlements, and it is possible that the Groves (3-5) had lived in or near Windsor or Hartford and had removed to Stratford before 1650, as recorded by Alma Lewis James. ³ Nathaniel's acquaintance with Hannah and Elizabeth Groves could well have occurred prior to the time that the Groves moved to Stratford, but according to the above source, we are led to believe that Nathaniel must have made his home in Stratford following his marriage to Hannah Groves, at about 1663. (Maps #4, #5)

At that time the town of Stratford had grown from the founding group of about seventeen families, among whom had been the Groves family, to a well-established and booming port town. Stratford is located in a remarkable, unique and picturesque setting. It sits beside the Housatonic river just a mile and a half from Long Island Sound. It is fourteen miles from New Haven and fifty eight miles in the opposite direction from New York City. The numerous hills or elevations of the area afforded ideal sites for dwellings, in full view of many miles of water scenery from the river and the Sound, and landscape to be seen beyond to Long Island across the Sound. The balmy breezes of the Atlantic and the bracing, if not sometimes the biting, winds from the

hills at the west and the north, brought great vigor of health and longevity of life.

Before the town was named Stratford, it was called by two Indian names, Pequonnocke, or Cupheag. By 1643, the name Stratford had been adopted. Whether it was named for Stratford on Avon, in honor of England's William Shakespear, or after the town of Stratford in Essex County, England, tradition has failed to reveal. Most of the towns in New England were called by counterparts in Old England.

A map of Stratford dated 1660 reveals the location of Nathaniel's home lot. (See Map #4)

"All the proceedings of the town, from the first record now remaining, are founded upon the implied ownership by a company of first settlers. It appears by the records, and tradition confirms the same, that about the year 1650, the records, then kept in a private house, were accidentally burned...and then the claims of the settlers, most of them, were reentered by the town clerk, as the parties described them and as was generally known to be the facts. After this, when new parties came into the town, they were granted a home lot of about two acres free, upon condition that they would build upon and improve it for three years, after which they could sell it to their own profit, if they desired so to do..."⁴

Nathaniel and his wife, no doubt, obtained their home lot under just such an arrangement, and as far as record reveals, they made it their home for the few years they had with their family of children.

Little has been recorded of personal entry on Nathaniel's life work. He lived in Stratford during the time of many Indian disturbances incident to the King Philip's War of 1676. The last severe struggle of this war was fought in the swampy areas of central Rhode Island to the east. Many of the young men of Connecticut fought in this final battle and many were killed. The Indian Chief whom the English called King Philip, and who was greatly responsible for the war, escaped, and a chase ensued which trailed him and his companions across the wilderness area of southern Connecticut. He was finally captured in the area of New Haven, which lay only a few miles from Stratford. It was at New Haven that the chief was given a trial and executed. The trauma of the event was felt over all of New England and especially along the trail of the chase and at New Haven and its surrounding communities. The hearts of all the people were filled with excitement, anxiety, and in many cases, with great fear. There fell a great calm of subdued silence as the chase ended and the news of the execution was heard. Victory succeeded in diminishing the occurrences of Indian savagery in the future of New England's colonization.

At the time of Nathaniel's death in 1680, two years following the war, his oldest child was only 15 years of age, and his youngest, our Mary, was a baby of two or three years. Elizabeth passed away Feb. 6, 1683, only three years after her husband had died, leaving a family of young children to be cared for by others.

Nathaniel and his first wife, Hannah Groves, had four children, namely:

- '1. Hanna Porter, b. April 20, 1665
2. Sarah Porter, b. Sept. 7. 1667; md. Samuel Beach.

3. Ruth Porter, b. Nov. 2, 1669
4. Nathaniel Porter, b. Aug. 27, 1672" 5

Soon after Hannah died, and in 1673, Nathaniel married her sister, Elizabeth Groves, and to them three more children were born, namely:

- "5. John Porter, b. March 20, 1674
6. Samuel Porter, b. July 17, 1675
7. Mary Porter, b. Feb. 28, 1676/7; md. Robert Royce of Wallingford and Meriden, Conn." 6 (1-3)

Robert was the son of Samuel Royce (1-2) of New London and Wallingford, Conn., who was the son of the immigrant, Robert Royce, who settled first in Stratford and later in New London.

From the union of Robert Royce and Mary Porter came a family line that migrated west to the Rocky Mountain areas of America. Their great grandson, Ira Rice, (1-6) planted a part of his family in Utah following the great trek of pioneers to establish a land of Zion under the direction of the Mormon Prophet, Brigham Young.

1. #15 (a), p.68
2. #2, Vol. 4, chart (35-27)
3. #15(a), p.68
4. #110, p.87
5. #1(i), p.118
also #170, p. (3-3)
6. ibid