

HENRY COOK (1615-1661)

JUDITH BIRDSALL (abt. 1618-1689)

A family group sheet submitted to the Genealogical Library in Salt Lake City by researcher, Leida R. J. Hatch, gives the following information: The parents of Henry Cook were Edmund and Elizabeth (Nicholis) Cook, and the listing of the children of Henry and Judith (Birdsall) Cook, all born in Salem Essex County, Massachusetts, was as follows:

1. Isaac Cook, b. 3 Apr. 1640; md. May 3, 1664, Elizabeth Buxton; died fall of 1692
2. Samuel Cook, n. Drpy. 30, 1641; md. (1) May 2, 1667, Hope Parker, (2) July 14, 1690, Mary Roberts, (3) July 14, 1696, Mary Mallory; died, March, 1703
3. Judith Cook, b. Sept. 15, 1643; md. Nov. 18, 1662, John Pudney
4. Rachel Cook, b. Sept. 25, 1645; md. Dec. 12, 1667, Elisha Kebee; died Sept. 10, 1740
5. John Cook, b. Apr. 6, 1647; md Dec. 28, 1671, Mary Buxton; died 1776
6. Mary Cook (twin), b. Sept. 15, 1649; md. Robert Moulton
7. Martha Cook (twin), b. Sept. 15, 1649
8. Henry Cook, b. Dec. 30, 1652; md. Sept. 30, 1678, Mary Hall; died 1705
9. Elizabeth Cook (twin), b. Sept. 1654; died, 1654
10. Hannah Cook (twin), b. Sept. 1654; md. Daniel Canady 1

Henry Cook emigrated from Yorkshire about 1630, and first settled in Plymouth, Mass. He was a young lad of about 15. Some time before 1636, he is recorded in Salem, Mass. Judith Birdsall had accompanied her father, Henry Birdsall (4-8), and her 17 year old brother, Nathan, from England and it is thought that they, too, landed first at Plymouth in 1632 when she was a young girl of about 13. They were soon settled in Salem, Mass. (map #2) Henry and Judith were married 29 June, 1639, at Salem where they remained during their lifetime. Henry and Judith were pioneers of an Indian wilderness.

"Henry Cook was at Plymouth, Mass., before 1640. He had sons Isaac, John, Henry and Samuel. Isaac is supposed to have remained at Plymouth, and John to have settled at Middletown. (map #2) Henry and Samuel settled at Wallingford, (4-6) and are the ancestors of most of the name of Cook in Connecticut, and of many in various parts of the country." 3

"It is not easy to picture the conditions from the present city, but consider the peninsula of Salem as covered with forest, broken, perhaps, with small clearings formerly made by the Indians, a few straggling houses along across the neck from river to river where the tunnel now is, and a group of huts of the old planters between Collins Cove and the North River. No one knew who owned the land, and probably nobody cared. There was land enough and the houses were built wherever the settlers fancied. Settlers brought cattle, sheep, goats, and poultry, and the cows destroyed the neighbors' corn and the hens scratched up his peas, running true to form, and the neighbors did not like it. Civil government arose, not from visionary ideas of theorists, but from practical men face to face with practical problems to be settled for everyday men in the ordinary walks of life." 4

In subsequent years, cow-herders were assigned and common pasture lands laid out. There were regulations about damages done by cattle and endless quarrels about negligent owners. The list of problems went on and on. Religious problems were no exception and Salem was having many growing pains. This was important to the residents of Salem because it was an admission that the Salem colony was drawing away from the Church of England and becoming a separatist organization. The theory of the Puritans in England was, and remained for a long time, that the Church of England was a true church, but needed simplification in church government and purifying in its forms of church worship. These ecclesiastical matters were dealt with by the help of ministers who came periodically with new ideas which made changes come more gradual. ⁵

"It was in the early autumn of 1637 that the idea of running the town by a committee occurred to the freeman....This choosing of a few respected citizens to run 'ye towne' was the origin of the title selectmen...

"Hardly had the town records begun before the question of roads came to the fore. Lawrence Leach, Richard Ingersoll, and others, were ordered to be sure to leave room for highways for carts to bring home wood. This probably described the reservation for Essex Street. The lot next to Captain Endecott's was reserved for a highway, '4 pole broad', and so it remains to this day..." ⁶

It is of interest to us of three hundred and fifty years later to understand how circumstances can differ the values placed upon human needs and how the solutions to life's problems deviate according to early or later times. What was important to the early American settler is a far cry from the complex considerations of today. James Duncan Phillips gives us some impression of early days in Salem in his book "Salem in the Seventeenth Century".

The first question was how to handle the cattle that had accumulated in the town. A lot of land west of the head of what is now Essex Street had been reserved for common pasture land, evidently for the milch herd, but it took a lot of time to get the cows there and back, and time was precious to men struggling hard for food to keep alive. This cattle driving was quite a business, and in April, 1637, the town hired a man to assemble the cows in town into a common pen each morning for the march to the pasture and to bring them back to town each night.

"He was to take the cattle at the pen at sun halfe an hower and to bring them in the sun halfe an hower high and what cattle are not brought into the pen before they goe out they to drive them after the keeper'. Any cattle left in town were to be taxed for town pasture...The duty of the keeper of the herd was to keep off the wolves. It was an all day job and any good Puritan could not be expected to forgo a three-hour sermon on Sunday to tend cows—but even this was thought of. The cows, of course, could not be expected to go hungry, so the 'Neck' was reserved for the cows' weekly holiday, where wolves could not break through and steal, and where a friendly ocean provided an impregnable fence, except where the Neck gate held the cattle back on the town side...This was one of the earliest regulations of the town of Salem.

"There were regulations made for the pigs, goats and sheep. There were hog sties over on Darby Fort side, probably not far from Forest River mouth, but the ubiquitous swine early made trouble around town. Goody Sherman's pig, which was the occasion of a change of the Massachusetts form of government, was not the first or the last of its kind which has

changed the affairs of men in Massachusetts. As much as they tried to avoid this problem, in towns such as Salem, by making orders and regulations, the pigs invariably failed to heed the law, but finally they were assigned to swineherds properly regulated as in the case of cattle.

"The problem of keeping the live stock out of the corn gives ample evidence of the importance of that crop. The herdsman had to take their pay in corn. Corn and hay were the staple crops, with more or less garden stuff for the needs of each family." 7

By 1650, Salem had grown from a scattering of settler huts of dirt floor and thatched roof, to about 400 houses. There are very few houses in Essex County now standing which date back to that early period. The houses of 1650 were definitely of better construction than were the houses of 1630. (Henry Cook lived to see Salem take on this new look and Judith, his wife, lived 24 years longer to see the town become a lively center of commerce.)

The Massachusetts Bay Company was formed to exploit the new land and was given a charter by the English Crown, and its first Colony was the coast settlement of Salem.

In the Spring of 1635, the General Court in Boston took notice of the fact that Marblehead (Salem) was growing and a committee was appointed to assist the settlement in laying out the bounds of its plantation. More information on the founding and early days of Salem and the activities of the Massachusetts Bay Company, the promoters of commerce in Salem's colony, is given in appendix #6.

William Pierce, master of the ship 'Desire' of Salem, was a useful member of the colony. He commanded the 'Lion' which was sent back to Ireland in 1630 for provisions which saved Salem's inhabitants from starvation in 1631. 8

This was about the time of Henry Cook's arrival at Plymouth and shortly before he was recorded in Salem. Henry and Judith were among those pioneers of Salem during the most trying times of this country's effort to colonize it's wilderness and tolerate the savage nature of it's dark skinned natives.

According to the record of Robert W. Johns, Henry died at Salem December 25, 1661, at the age of 46. Judith passed away September 11, 1689. 9 It is supposed that they were buried in a plot within the grounds of their own home property, as was often the custom in some of the early day settlements.

- 1, #170, p. (4-5)
2. #2, Vol. 9, p. (151-16)
3. #7, p. 672
4. #146, p. 90
5. ibid, p. 91
6. ibid, pp. 82, 83
7. ibid, pp. 90-93
8. ibid, pp. 27-33, 172
9. #2, Vol. 7, p. (105-359)