

HENRY BIRDSALL (abt.1590-1651) ae. abt.61

In 1964, George A. Birdsall reviewed the researches done on the Birdsall family, and its English origins, and credited Nathan Birdsall, the son of Henry Birdsall, as being the ancestor of most of the American Birdsalls. The review mentioned what is known about the origin of the name and genealogy of the family, as well as makes statements of all that seems to be factual about the immigrant, Henry Birdsall.

Selected and briefed portions of George Birdsall's review will have to suffice for our story of Henry.

After William the Conqueror of Normandy invaded England, he had a statistical survey made of all England, in the year 1086. This survey was recorded and is known as the Domesday Book. In one of the earliest translations, probably in the 1300's, the book revealed that six villages were combined for tax purposes and census taking. Birdsall was the name of one of these six villages that had a total of carucates of land totaling 2 miles long and 2 miles broad. (A carucate is of no definite size. It is a field that can be farmed, limited to what one man can do in a year) A house in Birdsall, now in ruins, was called the 'Birdsall House'. In English records the following Birdsalls were found, with periods of times estimated:

1480	Robert Birdsall - Killed in France, 1514 John - great grandfather of Henry who went to America
1500	Richard Birdsall of Tadcaster, recorded
1560	Robert Birdsall - recorded
1590	Henry Birdsall, born about this time. He went to America

The above chart is not necessarily a line of father to son. Mr. Birdsall goes on to state:

"A Will of Henry (1550) made in 1625 left things to William, Thomas and Mary. No mention is made of a son Henry. Many families name their oldest son after the father and Henry may have had a son Henry who received his share when he left home to go to America prior to when the Will was proved. The Will was made in 1625 and our Henry is supposed to have left England in 1628, although the records here first record him in 1632. He may have been given his share in order to pay his passage to America." ¹

"Henry Birdsall arrived in America, a widower, 1632, near Boston with his daughter, Judith, and son, Nathan, age 21. He was a member of the First Church, Salem, and known as Birdsall, 1636. He was registered as a Freeman at Salem, May 2, 1638...(map #2)

"Judith, if her birth date is 1619, and everyone does not agree on that, was 13 years old when she arrived in America. She undoubtedly kept house for her father and brother in Salem. Her father got into trouble with the Court for stealing an Indian girl. This trouble was probably caused by Judith running around with Henry Cook and neglecting her housekeeping duties. I don't think he stole the Indian girl, though he may have cheated on the wages to be paid. Judith married Henry Cook (4-5) in 1639..." ²

Nathan did not remain long in Salem. He traveled a lot among the Indians

and made friends among them. Nathan apparently made his living buying land from the Indians and negotiating sales to the white settlers.

"Nathan first appears in New Haven, Oct. 4, 1643, when he was taken to Court for taking 13 pounds from Mr. Newman's house. He had worked for Mr. Newman and was ordered to pay back double the amount. The next year Nathan was made a Freeman in New Haven, 1644. He was remitted of his defects in the 'Arme' (Army), provided he attend military training hitherto. At that time every able-bodied male belonged to the local army to protect the settlement.

"Nathan married about 1645, age about 34. He is recorded as having seven sons, namely; Benjamin, b. 1646; Stephen, b. 1648; Nathaniel, b. 1650; William, b. 1652; Nathan, b. 1654; Samuel, b. 1656; and Henry, b. 1656." ³

Nathan and his family moved several times, buying and selling land properties, first in New Haven, Conn., then in East Hampton, Long Island, N. Y. He was next heard of, as told by George Birdsall, at Southhold, Long Island, where he made land purchases and sales and was soon in Hempstead, L. I., where in 1657, he became one of the first settlers in East Hempstead.⁴

After Nathan was married and while he resided in New Haven, we are told that:

"Henry Birdsall, Nathan's father, apparently lived a year or two with Nathan in New Haven. I presume to keep him out of trouble during his troubles with Mr. Newman, the army and getting married, and while living there Henry was chosen by the Court of New Haven, (as accounted in the New Haven town records) December 3, 1644, to keep the Meeting House clean upon all public meetings for 3 pounds 15 shillings a year. "Good" Birdsall, as he was called, probably to identify him from his not-so-good son, was also paid 3 pounds 17 shillings for work done on a bridge." ⁵

Henry Birdsall probably returned to Salem, Mass., to be near his daughter, Judith, and her husband and family for, according to Robert W. Johns' pedigree chart submitted to the Connecticut Society of Genealogists, he died at Salem, Mass., in 1651, at the age of 61. ⁶

A recollection of conditions and the events that led up to Salem's settlement from the first, helps one realize the raw beginnings of this country. It is common knowledge that the first permanent settlement in New England occurred at Plymouth in 1620. In the Spring of 1635, the General Court in Boston took notice of the fact that Marble Head (Salem) was growing and appointed a committee to lay out the bounds of the plantation. The earliest records, pertaining to land, began Oct. 1, 1634. It would seem that Henry Birdsall came to Salem, Mass., in 1632, with his son, Nathan, and daughter, Judith.

Many settlers came to Salem, as charges of the Massachusetts Bay Company. The Company was allowed to take persons and goods to New England free of all duties and taxes for seven years. The passage money to America was paid in goods and services for the company. The ships sent out from England were to be loaded on their return with merchandise consigned to the Company, the results of the labor of the indentured servants. It was during the time of Henry's arrival that the Massachusetts Bay Company was thriving well in this

enterprise. We have no record of Henry to justify the presumption that he came with this enterprise, even though we know that many of Salem's early settlers came in this manner.

Knowing that Henry first embarked at Plymouth, south of Boston, before going to Salem, tends to discount the possibility of his having any connection with the Massachusetts Bay Company of England. Up until 1637, Salem had evidently been nothing more than a trading port for the Bay Company, and the only signs of a settlement had been the temporary, meagre huts hastily erected for the servants or ship charges whose aim was to colonize as soon as their obligation to the Company was paid off. Hunters, trappers and fishermen, frequented the port's commercial outlet for trade. Salem, as a settlement, had an interesting beginning in these efforts expended by the Massachusetts Bay Company. (See appendix #6)

Twelve men had signed an agreement at Cambridge, England, that they would be ready to embark for a plantation in Massachusetts, March 1, 1630, provided the charter, which they had obtained from the Crown, was transferred to New England authority. Matthew Craddock was chosen governor when the Charter was secured.

"He (Matthew Craddock) was a wealthy merchant and shipowner, and was always first with his subscription to any money needed to advance the colony. He gave time, effort and far-sighted leadership to the Company...

"The examination of the records of the Company lead one surely to the conclusion that these able men—and as a group, they were extraordinarily able men—had a very different object in view from that of making profits out of the transaction. Conditions at home, both religious and governmental, were becoming unbearable, and it is evident that they intended to establish a state in New England where the Puritan Church could exist and the constitutional rights of Englishmen would be respected. Even those who remained at home (not all twelve left England) had this idea in view, for, while they did not wish to leave England, they did regard New England as a probable refuge in case things grew yet worse at home..."⁷

This Company, referred to as the Massachusetts Bay Company, increased in numbers as friends joined and called themselves 'Adventurers'.

"They were not sailors or fishermen, but gentlemen—men of wealth and standing in their communities, and with a strong purpose in view. They did not come as explorers, as sight-seers, or as traders. They came to establish a Commonwealth with the intention of remaining forever in America...

"Like the Plymouth Colony before them, these settlers of Salem, Mass., spent a terrible first winter. Lack of food, lack of proper houses, and lack of clothes adapted to the climate, brought on disease and dreadful suffering. Scurvy and ship fever contracted during the long voyage had weakened many, and deaths came more and more often...The colony was suffering all the ills so well described in the case of first winters at Plymouth and Jamestown; but Salem had no historian, so there is no contemporary account of their hardships. It is known, however, that Salem did make a plea for ministers to be sent to them that the people might live 'unblamable and without reproof in the worship of God'. They asked that a 'Book for Records' be sent and by December 26, 1636, all proceedings of the town were recorded and kept. Those who

know the activities of the small New England town can easily recognize the beginnings in the early records. The town constable, the selectman, the road surveyors, overseers of the poor, school committee, fence viewers, field-drivers, pound-keepers, town clerk, tax collectors, were all here in Salem with the need and the duties clearly in evidence..." 8

"Remembering that at first the owners of the town were the freemen of the Company, it is not difficult to see that these few men could easily meet and decide on public matters..."

"It was in the early autumn of 1637 that the idea of running the town by a committee occurred to the freemen, and they voted 'that men shall be chosen for manadging the affairs of the Towne'. This was the origin of the selectmen..." 9

As the town began to function around its government, men began to acquire property. Civil government arose to the needs as men faced the practical problems to be settled.

Some very apparent benefits came from the practice of keeping records. Houses ceased to be general lodgings and individual ownership appeared. Their civil government was not something 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. How were the cattle to be pastured and the keeping of pigs regulated? Who is to be responsible for a fence?--a neighbor or oneself? These were samples of the practical needs to be met by the people of an early settlement. Even the more sophisticated need of laws that govern such things as roads and building standards had to wait till the immediate needs of food and mutual protection against the Indians were first met. The problem of a survey was not initially met and each settler selected his domain and marked its bounds by a tree, a trail, a creek, or even a pile of stones to mark the four corners.

"The first question was how to handle the cattle that had accumulated in the town and the cattle driving to and from the pasture and the herding of them through the day became quite a business. The hired herdsman was to take the cattle 'at the pen at sun halfe and hower and to bring them in the Sun halfe an hower high...' Hog sties were built but the 'ubiquitous swine made much trouble around town, for pigs do not heed the law'. In the spring of 1639 'it was resolved to sowe English graine'—fences must be kept up and regulations to that effect were passed. Corn and hay were the staple crops, with more or less garden stuff for the needs of each family." 10

As the settlers began to grow grain crops, the issue of regulation was even more apparent. The requirements of a settlement meant work projects unnumbered.

"Hardly had the town records begun before the question of roads came to the fore... Settlers were ordered to be sure to leave room for highways for carts to bring home wood and to reserve trails for the taking and bringing in of the milch cows." 11

The oldest highways were Essex Street, still existing today, and the various branches that bisected the town to make easy access to each planter's settlement. Seeing Salem in the twentieth century is a far cry from what

appeared in it's beginnings.

Henry spent 19 years in the New World at Salem, except for the time he spent with his son in New Haven, Connecticut, and if his arrival at Plymouth was 1628 he was in New England 24 years before his death in 1651. There is no record to show that he ever returned to England or that he ever married after his arrival in America.

1. #31, p.3
2. ibid, p.5
3. ibid, pp. 5, 7
4. ibid, p.7
5. ibid, p.5
6. #2, Vol. 7, p.(105-359)
7. #146, pp. 36, 37
8. ibid, pp.37, 38
9. ibid, pp.82, 83
10. ibid, pp.90, 91
11. ibid, p.83