

STEPHEN CRANE (abt. 1657-1738)  
 MARY DENISON (1660-1721)

Stephen Crane was born about 1657 at Dorchester (now Milton) Mass., the second child of Henry and Tabitha (Kinsley) Crane. He had an older brother, Benjamin, who was severely wounded in the last battle of King Philip's War. It was one of the bloodiest battles ever fought on New England soil. Thousands of Indians were killed in the Naragonsett Swamp.

There were four brothers and four sisters younger than Stephen and Benjamin. This large family grew up on their parents farm that later became known as "Crane's Plain".

Stephen married 1st., July 2, 1676 Mary Denison of Braintree, Mass. They were married in Milton, Mass. Mary was born 1660; died June 17, 1721. Stephen married 2nd, Aug. 13, 1723, Comfort, Widow of Samuel Belcher, of Braintree, Mass.<sup>1</sup>

The DAR record lists the children, all by Stephen's first wife, Mary:

1. Mary Crane, b. July, 1680
2. Tabitha Crane, b. Oct. 7, 1682; died Nov. 13, 1682
3. Elizabeth Crane, b. Mar. 14, 1684
4. Samuel Crane, b. May 23, 1687
5. Zerviah Crane, b. Nov. 30, 1690
6. Benjamin Crane, b. Dec. 17, 1692
7. Stephen Crane, b. Dec. 10, 1694
8. Hannah Crane, b. July 5, 1697
9. Mehitable Crane, b. Oct. 5, 1702; md. 2 Apr. 1730, Elkanah Babbitt,  
 as his second wife. 2 (7-3)

It could be a likely assumption that since the family of Elkanah's parents, Elkanah and Elizabeth (Briggs) Babbitt, lived near neighbors to Mehitable Crane's Uncle John and Aunt Hannah Crane, that Mehitable could very likely have met Elkanah Babbitt Jr. on a visit to her relatives in Taunton. The scarcity of these kind of details leave a reader with a yearning to fold back the years for a closer look at those whom we can claim as kin.

Mehitable was nineteen years of age when her mother, Mary (Denison) Crane died June 17, 1721. Her stepmother, Comfort, lived seven years after the passing of her father, Stephen Crane, who died July 20, 1738, at the age of 81 years. Comfort died at Milton, Mass., Dec. 21, 1745.

It is of personal interest to realize that through the marriage of Mehitable Crane and Elkanah Babbitt, of Berkley, Mass. (7-3) two great lines were merged to give descendants a New England inheritance which may be contemplated with just pride.

The Cranes, like the Babbitts, were land owners and farmers, industrious, hard working people, who made do with what was available for a livelihood in their time and locality. They depended upon mother nature for most of their sustenance; food, clothing, shelter and safety. They followed the early Pilgrim laws and methods as they were dictated to them from Plymouth. All of the surrounding settlements were a part of the Plymouth Colony.

Betsey D. Keene wrote a picturesque account of life in and around the early settlements of Massachusetts which apply to the time of Stephen and Mary (Denison) Crane. Some of her information is selected and given in brief for this writing.

The farmers of the early settlements had endless struggles trying to save their small crops from destruction by the wild animals and birds that frequented the areas in such large numbers. Ravenous wolves were a constant threat to their cattle, sheep and other domestic animals and fowls. The numberless wolves when full grown were, on an average, five feet five inches in length (nose to tail end) 33 inches in height and weighing over one hundred pounds. They were a dangerous foe as well as a killer of the young wild deer that furnished the farmer with an inexhaustible source of meat. A large hand-forged trap placed near some bait meat was one invention that was effective and deadly. The trap had the name "M. Standish" stamped right into the upper spring. A man had to stand on the springs to open the seven inch long jaws in order to set the trap.

The planting of their crops and gardens was largely governed by the Indian's traditional signs: "wait for the blue-birds coming"; "winter will not rot in the sky"; "when oak leaves are no bigger than a mouse-ear"; "watch for the changes of the moon". They raised several kinds of vegetables, especially pumpkins. There was a saying: "Let no man make a jest of pumpkins, for with this food the Lord was pleased to feed his people til Corne and Cattel was increased." A poem has been preserved through these many years:



We have pumpkins in morning  
and pumpkins at noon  
If it were not for pumpkins  
we should be undone.  
If barley be wanting  
to make into malt,  
We must then be content,  
and think it no fault,  
For we can make liquor  
to sweeten our lips  
Of pumpkins and parsnips  
and walnut tree chips. 3



From earliest days wild game and fish furnished an important part of the settler's food. The deer would have increased to a multitude of numbers had it not been for the common devouring wolf. The families maintained themselves almost wholly by the labor of their own hands and communities entered into a cooperative endeavor whenever the needs demanded greater assistance during certain seasons. Neighbors would gather for recreational events and pioneer life was not without a measure of gayety. A church house with its ordained minister had a binding influence toward public charities.

Water-mills were used to pound corn but it was more the usual case for each household to pound their own corn the "pestle-and-mortar" style. There were a few hand-mills that had been brought over from England that were used by some families. The stones of two of these hand-mills have been preserved and put on display at the Dedham (Mass.) Historical Society. They measure about ten inches in diameter and have a thickness of three and one-half inches.

Before many settlements had a grist mill, some of their inhabitants trudged all the way to Plymouth with a bag of grain to grind, while others made the journey on the back of a horse or an ox. A toll of two quarts of grain from every bushel ground sufficed for the labor. Plymouth had a mill as early as 1633.

A good supply of Indian corn was raised, and the farmers were soon able to trade for other produce. When it was found that the debt of King Philip's War (1675) nearly equalled all the personal property of the Plymouth Colony, Boston and its outlying settlements, as well as areas in Connecticut made donations of large amounts of corn to the cause. At the time of the Irish famine the descendants of the same Puritan people sent ship loads of their corn to Ireland: "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days." 4

1. #52 p. 4
2. #71 pp. 58, 59
3. #139, pp. 27, 28
4. *ibid*, p. 28