

RICHARD PRATT (1615-1691)
 MARY _____ (-after 1691)

Richard's father died at Malden, England, July 30, 1619. If this is correct then Richard was a child of 4 years when he lost his father.

The DAR findings reveal that Richard Pratt of Malden, Mass., came from Malden, Essex England and that his father was John Pratt. Richard's bapt. was June 29, 1615, at Malden, England. He came to New England sometime between 1630-1640. If the date was 1630 he was 15 years of age, if the latter date, he was 25. He settled first in Charlestown, a Boston Harbor town (map #2), where he was a proprietor in 1649. He married Mary ----- about 1641. His Will dated May 8, 1691 was probated October 6, 1691. ¹

It was in 1630, when Richard Pratt was 15 years of age, that the distinguished preacher, Thomas Hooker, was silenced for non-conformity to the Church of England. He had been known in Malden, Essex County, England, for his dramatic and influential oratory. Richard's home was in Malden where such had been the popularity of Rev. Hooker that many from all parts of Essex and Hertfordshire counties flocked to hear him. There is no doubt that our ancestor, Richard Pratt was well aware of, and even involved in, all of the circumstances surrounding the ecclesiastical domination of the Church of England at the time. There is no reason to doubt that he was inspired at this early age, as many others in the area, by strong religious principles, to emigrate to this Western World. (map 1, #28)

In order to escape fines and imprisonment, Rev. Hooker fled to Holland, and, after a two year stay there, became satisfied that the best hope of freedom of worship lay in the lands far distant. Realizing that many of his friends and supporters in Essex and Hertfordshire, England, were on the 'wing for a wilderness in America,' where they hoped for an opportunity to enjoy and practice the pure worship, he readily answered their invitation to join them as their spiritual leader. He therefore left Holland and embarked with many others for the New World in the "Griffin," a ship of 300 tons, and arrived in Boston, Sept. 4, 1633.

"On the 11th of October, 1633, the Church was gathered, and after solemn fasting and prayer, Thomas Hooker was ordained the Pastor and Mr. Samuel Stone, his assistant, was ordained a teacher and the meeting was conducted by them in their respective offices.

"But Rev. Hooker and many of his congregation was not satisfied with Newtown (Boston) as a place of residence. So many emigrants had arrived that they began to be 'straightened for lands' and from representations which had been made in regard to the lands in the valleys of the Connecticut River, they resolved on a removal. Accordingly about the middle of June, 1636, not quite three years after the organization of their church, Mr. Hooker, Mr. Stone and about an hundred men, women and children, took their departure and traveled west through the wilderness to start a settlement where Hartford, Connecticut now stands." ²

Though we can be sure that Richard and Mary had close religious ties with the Rev. Hooker and belonged to his church in Boston, they did not choose to be among the group who went to Hartford. By 1655 they had settled in Malden, Mass., a settlement to the north of Charlestown but still situated in the Boston Bay Harbor area. In Malden, Richard took an active part in the affairs of

that early settlement. Harriet M. Stryker Rodda in 1974, gave us the following review:

"Richard Pratt, youngest son of John Pratt of Malden, Essex County, England was bapt. there 29 June 1615; died between 8 May and 6 October 1691 in Malden, Mass. He married Mary _____ who survived him.

"Richard Pratt settled in Malden, Massachusetts where he owned a small homelot of four acres on which he built a house and the necessary buildings for his small farm. If he had any occupation other than farming, it has not appeared in the records. His Will of 8 May 1691 (Middlesex County, Mass. #17926) is short and explicit. In it he names his living children and gives his land and buildings to his son Thomas after the death of his wife Mary. Children, all born and reared in Malden are listed:

1. Mary Pratt, b. or bapt 30 Sept. 1643; died at Colchester, Conn. 26 March 1704; married Thomas II Skinner born at Chichester, England, 25 July 1645; died after May 1722.
2. Thomas Pratt, born 5 May 1646 md. Ellis or Alice _____
3. Mercy Pratt born 15 June 1650; died young
4. John Pratt, born 1655; died at Malden 3 June 1708; married Mary _____ who died 17 May 1710 in her 56th year
5. Hannah Pratt, married 31 May 1677 Joseph Hovey
6. Elizabeth Pratt, married Gershom Hawkes
7. Martha Pratt, married 18 November 1686 John Pratt, son of Thomas and Sarah _____ Pratt, born 29 May 1664." 3

The oldest son, Thomas, left the original land of his father to his oldest son Richard. Descendants remained in the Malden area for many generations. The home was situated in the neighborhood of Sagamore Hill where a little village sprang up that perpetuates the memory of the Pratt family.

Malden is a few miles to the north of Boston and is now within its bounds, inside the beltway that surrounds the vicinity of larger Boston.

We are not sure about the time of Richard's landing in Boston. One author gave his arrival as sometime between 1630 and 1640. Neither do we have the date of his marriage to Mary but their first child, Mary, our ancestor, was born in 1643 at Charlestown, now a part of Boston. (map #2)

The supposition that he was a follower of Mr. Hooker in Malden England and again in New England leads to the premise that religious convictions motivated him to come to the New World. Those who emigrated at this early date were escaping the persecutions inflicted upon the Puritans in England. Most groups came bringing their pastors with them, to set up churches in newly found settlements. These congregations, while yet in England, observed special seasons of fasting and prayer, in which they unitedly laid their cause before Him from whom all good councils proceed. "We have every reason to believe that in this momentous enterprise they took no step without their eye fixed on God for light, guidance and direction . . ." 4

It is surely not deemed entirely irrelevant, in a work like this, to speak of the causes which led people to bid final farewell to the homes of their child-

hood, to encounter the perils of the ocean, and expose themselves to unseen dangers in a land uncleared, untilled and beset by lurking savages. We are told that they believed it was no less than the will of God that they leave the comforts of an established home in the old world and seek their future abode beyond the waters.

It was the desire to enjoy a more simple and unostentatious mode of worship than that which was required by the Church of England, which caused the settlement of New England . . . They loved their native land and they left it with regrets but to be forbidden to serve God in a manner which they regarded in the highest degree subservient to their spiritual welfare, was intolerable. It was not until every expedient for the reformation of the church, in their own country had failed, that they realized their only hope was removal. These were the characteristics of those who came to New England; who laid the foundation of American society, and planted the germ of our civil and religious institutions and made our land what it is, the cradle of liberty." ⁵

We might conjecture that such impelling forces led Richard to make a home, first in Charlestown, Mass. where he was a proprietor in 1649, and thence to Malden, Mass. in 1655 which became his permanent home and the home of some of his posterity for many generations. (map #2)

In spite of the moralistic motives of the immigrants, the struggles for freedom of worship continued in the New World. Richard and Mary, living in the Boston area, were no doubt aware of this struggle. Anne Hutchinson, a deeply religious woman promoting a more genuine spirit of charity was banished for questioning the established Puritan government. Many dissenters, including Quakers, were executed in Boston for their religious views during the lifetime of Richard and Mary.

In Massachusetts, as in other parts of the world in every age, persecution bred a reckless heroism among the persecuted. The courage of the martyrs facing punishment or death, won more converts to their views than their preaching. The Puritan leaders of Massachusetts, with their intolerance of other dissenting sects would, sooner or later, have to submit their theocracy to the freedoms of a democracy. This principle could not be restrained, for the very nature of the vast wilderness of America encouraged independence and self-government.

The year of Richard's death (1691) saw the merging of the several eastern colonies of New England with an English charter, providing that "forever hereafter there shall be liberty of conscience in the worship of God to all Christians." The struggle for liberty in America took a new form. The charter was directed against the aristocrats who presumed to rule. It did not guarantee all of man's rights but it was a step in the right direction and gave hope for further moves toward a government for and by the people. The light of a good government was lit to steer America's course to a safe harbor of religious liberty.

Like the tides of the sea, ever rising up and falling back, the tyrants of history rise and fall. Time after time, wilful, determined men -- sometimes with lofty intentions -- have tried to compel mankind to accept one creed, and rally around one religion. Back and forth across the centuries battles for

freedoms have raged. A few times the tides of tyranny have have submerged a large part of the civilized world. But despite threats and persecution no ruling power has yet succeeded in keeping mankind submerged. So it was with the struggles in the early years of New England's British rule. Like the rise and fall of the tides of the sea, her course was rough at times of storm and the struggle went on with varied ups and downs.

1. #71 p. 5
2. #60 p. 11
3. #41 p. 114
4. #60 p. 10
5. ibid p. 9