

JOHN MOSS (abt. 1603/4-1707)
 ABIGAIL CHARLES (abt. 1606-)

"The family name Moss is, according to most authorities, derived from the English Morse or Moose, nickname for the Christian name Moses. Occasionally it is a shortened form of Morris, Morse, and in some cases is derived from a term used to indicate residence at the Moss, as Johannes del Mosse, recorded in the Poll Tax of Yorkshire, A.D. 1379." ¹

The surname of Morse, Morss, and Moss (with numerous other variations in spelling) occurs in the United States. These various spellings, even in the branches of the same family, increases the difficulty of ascertaining family relationships.

"The settlers of this surname Morse and Moss in New England were staunch Puritans, and of that class who strove to separate from the corruptions of the English Church, but yet continued in her communion, until their embarkation to this country to escape the persecutions of Laud, and seeking in a new country a 'faith's pure shrine.'

"On the elevation of William Laud to the Primacy of England, in 1633, a Commission was illegally instituted, called the 'Commissioners of Plantations, who, to embarrass the Puritans, prohibited the promiscuous passing of his Magestry's subjects to this country, requiring of subsidy to procure a license and the attestation of two justices before they could embark. Many of the Puritans came over clandestinely . . ." ²

In spite of the years of Puritan and Pilgrim intolerance in America, and their strict observances of the laws as they then made them for the time in which they lived, we must allow that the colonies would not, probably, have kept together, or their safety been assured, if it had not been for this element of excluding all discordant forces. The early communities, being new, were weak in the face of the many grave dangers that surrounded them; and so, for both religious and political reasons they felt the necessity to restrict doctrinal differences and make punishments severe. To those early fathers any form of disunity was frightening. Whatever, therefore, that might seem narrow, intolerant and exclusive to us, as we see them now, must be looked upon in the light of circumstances as they existed for those people who pioneered a wilderness. Let us not forget that it was those Puritans that had to conquer the Indians, resist the power of kings, establish colleges and schools, and form a representative government. It was such a people who made dominant a pure morality and developed a loftier type of manhood.

We were told that those of the name of Moss who immigrated to America were staunch Puritans. Such a reference brings us to a point of distinguishing the beliefs of the Puritans and understanding their differences from the people who first landed as Pilgrims.

The Pilgrims were regarded as Separatists. That all Separatists had been Puritans, is, I presume, the fact; but there was a radical difference between them as the terms were understood in colonial times. The Puritans had no sympathy with the Pilgrim's secession or withdrawal from the established church. The Puritans held to a belief in loyalties to a central government but they also believed that it was the immemorial right of an Englishman not to be taxed without his consent. To the Pilgrim, the Church organization was their government.

The trend of events during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries obliterated the differences that the two groups may have had and more often than not we refer to all those who came from England for religious freedom as Puritans whose goal was to purify the wrongs of the church in England, and form a worship service without either a dependence upon a King or the Pope.

The settlement of New Haven was founded on Puritan principles. The founding fathers were staunch religious men and anyone of questionable character was excluded from its bounds. John Moss is found listed with Rev. Davenport and Theophilus Eaton in matters of legislation in the Colony of New Haven, Conn. (For a review of the part played by Davenport and Eaton - see story 7-81).

The most comprehensive study of the life of John Moss was found in the writings of William Richard Cutter, who made a study of the Moss Family in 1912. His words collaborate what earlier writers had stated much more briefly and more precisely for statistical data.

". . .The name Moss (or Morse) appeared in the records of Suffolk county, England, in 1589, about the same time in Essex county, and also became common in Norfolk county. Of those who emigrated to New England in early days, none were more highly honored by their fellows than John Moss, who is believed to have been a member of a family of high standing in England, on account of his high attainments and evident culture. The family has included many educators ministers and men of the learned professions, and the name has always stood for good citizenship.

"John Moss (whose name sometimes appears as Mosse) was of New Haven. . .The exact date of his birth is unknown, some authorities giving it as near 1619, while others claim he was one hundred and three years old at the time of his death in 1707. He was one of the noble band who founded New Haven, Connecticut, and was much esteemed for his high quality of courage, his excellent judgment in matters relating to the common welfare, his firmness of character, his piety and perseverance. His advice and counsel were sought by the wisest and holiest men of his day, and he was in the highest sense a godly Puritan, ready to perform his full duty at all times. His fellow citizens honored him in many ways, and he was one of the most prominent men of New Haven at the time of its settlement.

"He was one of the members of the first general court in 1639-40, and was often called upon to advocate a case in the civil courts; on the union of New Haven with Connecticut he was repeatedly sent to the general court at Hartford, and was appointed a magistrate. When part of New Haven was set apart as Wallingford, March 11, 1669, he became one of the committee to manage all the plantation affairs of the latter place, the other members being Samuel Street, John Brockett, and Abraham Doolittle. They were to dispose and distribute the allotments in such equal manner as was best suited to the condition of the place and the inhabitants there-of, and to use the best means in their power to secure a fit man to dispense the word of God.

"The name of John Moss was prominently identified with all the leading measures of the village of Wallingford, and he was assigned the second home lot, near the south end of Main Street, on the east side. He was prominent in both state and church affairs, and was well fitted by natural ability and experience to take his place among the rulers of the new town." 3

In 1925 the American Historical Society Inc. printed for Agnes D. Morse a short but pertinent review of John Moss in these words:

"John Moss, born 1603-04, was with the earliest settlers of New Haven Colony, and signed the covenant with the Planters' Associates, June 4, 1639 (appendix #7). He was a member of the first General Court, February 18, 1639; July, 1648; June, 1649, and August, 1664; and was chosen corporal, August 6, 1642. In 1670, at the age of 67 years, he was one of the incorporators of that part of New Haven which was set off as Wallingford, where he was chosen commissioner, in May, 1678, and was reelected eighteen times, serving as Deputy also for Wallingford and Meriden. He died in Wallingford, Connecticut, in 1703, aged one hundred years. The only record of his wife is that "Goody Moss" was assigned a seat in New Haven Meeting-house." 4

A sheet submitted to the Genealogical Society in Salt Lake City by Mrs. Wilma Altman of Sacramento Calif. gave John Moss' wife's name as Abigail Charles. Recent research must have revealed this needed detail.

All of the Moss children were born in New Haven and were grown by the time they removed from New Haven to Wallingford. Their youngest daughter, Esther, married Nathaniel Royce, who was a son of Robert Royce, the immigrant (1-1), and brother of our Samuel (1-2). Mary Moss, their sixth child, married John Peck (7-72) and they too, moved north and became proprietors of Wallingford and all three were signers of the early Wallingford Covenant (appendix #8).

According to the DAR study the Moss children are listed in the following manner:

- "1. John Moss, bp. Jan. 11, 1639; died young
2. Samuel Moss, bp. Apr. 4, 1641
3. Abigail Moss, bp. Apr. 10, 1642; died Nov. 5, 1710; md. July 2, 1663, Abraham Doolittle
4. Rev. Joseph Moss, bp. Nov. 6, 1643; died 1727, md. (1) Mary, dau. of Roger Alling and Mary Nash, (2) July 11, 1717, Sarah, dau. of Joseph Peck and Sarah (Parker) widow of Matthew Gilbert.
5. Ephraim Moss, bp. Nov. 16, 1645, died young
6. Mary Moss, bp. Apr. 11, 1647; md. Nov. 3, 1664, John Peck (7-72). She died Nov. 16, 1725 at Wallingford
7. Mercy Moss, bp. Apr. 1, 1649, died 1685, md. Elizabeth, dau. of William Curtis
8. John Moss, bp. Oct. 12, 1650; died Mar. 31, 1717; md. Dec. 12, 1676 in Wallingford, Martha, dau. of Samuel Lathrop and Elizabeth Scudder
9. Elizabeth Moss, bp. Oct. 7, 1652; died 1706; md. Jan. 18, 1670, Nathaniel Hitchcock, son of Matthew
10. Esther Moss, b. June 16, 1654; died June 19, 1677, md. Oct. 27, 1673 Nathaniel Royce
11. Isaac Moss, b. July 1, 1655; died 1659 (age 4)" 5

During the years that the family resided in New Haven John Moss did his share of military training and served as corporal.

"Soldiers were on duty every night. One fourth of the men subject to bear arms were paraded before the meeting-house every Sunday, and were at frequent intervals trained on a week day. Six times in the year the whole military force of the plantation was called out. A general training brought together not only those obliged to train, but old men, women, and children as spectators of the military exercises, and of the athletic games with which they were

accompanied. Almost as many people were in the Market place on training day as on Sunday, and those who came had greater opportunity for social converse than on the Day of Worship. The enjoyment which each experienced in watching the maneuvers of the soldiers, and the games of cudgel, backsword, fencing, running, leaping, wrestling, and nine-pins, was enhanced by the sharing, meeting old friends, and making acquaintance with new ones.

"Election days were also occasions when the people left their homes and came together. The meeting of a plantation court did not indeed bring out the wives and daughters of the planters as a general training did; but when the annual election for the jurisdiction took place, the pillion was fastened behind the saddle and the goodwife rode with her goodman, even from the remotest plantation, to truck some of the yarn she had been spinning, for ribbons and other foreign goods, as well as to gather up the gossip of the year. On such occasions a store of cake was provided beforehand, and "election cake" is consequently one of the institutions transmitted from our forefathers.

"For several years there were two fairs held annually at New Haven, one in May, and one in September, for the sale of cattle and other stock as well as to buy or sell merchandise. These of course, attracted people from all parts of the jurisdiction.

"In addition to these public assemblies of one kind or another, there was daily intercourse between neighbors. Women sometimes carried their wheels from one house to another, that they might spin in company. There were gatherings at weddings and funerals. There was neighborly assistance in nursing and watching the sick. There were house-raising, when the neighbors assembled to lift and put together the timbers for a new dwelling; and house-warmings to rejoice with those who had taken possession of the house. There were huskings in the autumn when the maize had been gathered and brought in; but in the plantation of New Haven single persons were not allowed to "meet together upon pretence of husking Indian corn, out of the family to which they belong, after nine of the clock at night, unless the master or parent of such person or persons be with them to prevent disorders at such times, or some fit person intrusted to that end by the said parent or master.

"In view of the frequency with which the planters were convened, it is evident that, however affected by their Puritanism and by emigration to a wilderness, they were a social people . . .

"In 1667 the General Assembly of Connecticut granted to "the town of New Haven, liberty to make a village on the East River, if they see it capable for such a thing, provided they settle a village there within four years from May next. In 1670 the same authority incorporated 'New Haven village' as a town and named it Wallingford. A few planters were on the ground before this last action; but during the year in which it was incorporated as a town, an organized company removed from New Haven to occupy the new village." ⁶

We have already been made aware of John Moss' participation in the management of this new settlement. The subtraction of some fifty families from the census of New Haven for the settlement of Wallingford made the growth of New Haven appear less than it really was. We need to remember that the influx of immigrants at this particular time was such that New Haven, like many other coastal settlements, was constantly receiving immigrants needing homes.

The undertaking of new settlements further into the mainland was a great peril on account of the Indians. The coastal towns were more easily fortified but wilderness areas of the inland country were more open to sudden surprise attacks.

"At the time (1670) the whole population within the territory now called Connecticut was about ten thousand. Making a new settlement was quite a formidable undertaking. The Indians, though kind, were kind only from motives of interest or fear. How long they would remain so, was a question asked doubtfully, and answered by an apprehensive glance of the eye. Wolves, in thousands, infested the new settlements. They killed the cattle, they stole and carried off the sheep, and did what they could by their unearthly howlings at night, to add to the horrors that thickened on the skirts of the wilderness. The moose, the deer and the bear, roamed at will.

"It was absolutely necessary that the settlers should turn the wilderness into gardens and fields; that they should plant and cultivate the earth, to keep them from starvation. It was necessary to erect and fortify houses, and to make preparations for enclosures for their domestic animals. It was of equal importance to the planters, not only to make roads for their particular convenience, but from town to town; that, in any emergency, they might fly immediately to each others aid and relief. But they were willing to work; they had abandoned their estates, their families, and their country, for the obtainment of peace and freedom; and they themselves were ready to traverse the vast wilderness of an unexplored continent, rather than submit to that moral degradation which can alone satisfy the capriciousness of despotism. When once they had put their shoulders to the wheel they never looked back." 7

1. #85 p. 8
2. #83 p. 15
3. #152 Vol.3, p. 1270
4. #85 p. 8
5. #71 pp. 4, 5
6. #111 pp. 70-71
7. #7. pp. 70-71