

JOHN BROCKETT (1609-1690)
 SISTER BROCKETT ()

"In 1620, when the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth, New England was one vast wilderness, inhabited only by Indians and wild beasts. For the first decade immigration was very light, and but few settlements were made. The oppressive acts of King Charles I led to quite an increase of immigration between 1630 and 1640.

"On the twenty-sixth of June, 1637, the ship 'Hector,' with its consort, arrived in Boston, bringing a company of immigrants, who received a warmer welcome than ordinary.

"It was composed of persons of opulence, intelligence, and business experience, who had come with their families and whole estates from England for a home in America.

"With them came Rev. John Davenport, who had become celebrated in London, first as a preacher, second for his courageous efforts during the dreadful plague in 1625 . . . , and, third, for coming in conflict with Archbishop Laud on account of his non-conformist views and through whose persecution he was led to withdraw from the Established Church and form a Puritan congregation in London.

"Also with them came Theophilus Eaton, a prosperous merchant, Deputy Governor of the East Land Company, and who for several years had resided in Denmark as an agent of King Charles I. On his return to England he left the Established Church and became a member of Rev. Davenport's congregation of Puritans. He had been one of the original patentees of the Charter of Massachusetts; not only of the people of Boston but of the whole English Commonwealth in America then claimed by the Crown.

"When considerations were in the making for a migration of this particular group of Puritans to New England the Lords of the Admiralty for the King's Service began to give some attention to the great surge of emigrants leaving England. Many of those who embraced the non-conformist groups were men of great influence and wealth and so the authorities were soon to put up restrictions that would make it more difficult to leave. It seemed, for a time, that the ship 'Hector' and its consort would not be able to sail. Final release was obtained by the captain after making two appeals and the crew and passengers left for Boston. On their arrival they met with an unusual welcome by officials of Massachusetts Colony. They were desirous that this company of men of affluence remain on the eastern coast. However colonization for England's possession of land was not in accord with the purposes of either Davenport or Eaton. Davenport's idea seemed to be to found a separate colony which should be absolutely controlled by the church; only church members eligible for office, or even allowed to vote . . . ; it must be a church of the Congregational order with which he was identified."

"During the summer of 1637 that portion of the southern shore of Connecticut lying between what is now Saybrook and Fairfield, had earlier been discovered by explorers through Indian pursuits and fur trading endeavors; and in August of that same year Theophilus Eaton headed an exploring party and came by water from Boston to the mouth of the Quinnipiac River. They were so well pleased with the locality that they left seven of their number to hold possession and prepare for the permanent occupation of the place. In the ensuing April (1838) the whole company, including John Brockett...arrived from Boston." 1 (map #5)

Pages 13 through 30 of the Brockett genealogy by Edward J. Brockett, 1905, contains a detailed account of the circumstances surrounding John

Brockett's decision to leave Hertfordshire, England, come to New England and settle in New Haven and Wallingford, Connecticut. The tradition remains on record in brief form and is stated in the DAR report:

"John Brockett was the oldest son of Sir John Brockett of Brockett Hall, Hertfordshire, England; that on account of his puritanical ideas his father (who had been knighted by Queen Elizabeth) disinherited him and that John then gave up all claims to the title and estates of the Brocketts in England, in order to join the Puritan Band which came with Rev. John Davenport and Theophilus Eaton to Boston and thence to New Haven, Connecticut.

". . . Before coming to this country, John Brockett fell in love with a Puritan maiden; that for her sake he gave up his right to the paternal estate; came to this country, established himself, provided a home for the wife, returned to England, married her and brought her to America . . .

"There is no record of John Brockett's marriage or the name of his wife but, as in the first tax bill, he is mentioned as one person and in the first assignment of seats in the church at New Haven had but one seat. However, in 1646, a seat was assigned to 'Sister Brockett' which is evidence that he found a wife between 1640-1646. . ." ²

John had been disinherited by his father, Sir John, in Hertfordshire and his name, and probably his marriage to a Puritan, had been removed from all family records. Sir John's plot of secrecy has since been disclosed for the sake of our immigrant's posterity in America. The father's act of disownment had been motivated by his displeasure of his son's acceptance of Puritanism and becoming a follower of the Rev. William Davenport and Theophilus Eaton.

"It is generally supposed that he (John) married in England; that his first son was born there and his wife followed him to New England in 1644. We find, however, that the tombstone of his first son states his death in 1720, age 78 years, which would show he was born in 1642 and since nothing appears in the colonial records (except his tax) from the middle of 1640 to the end of 1641 leads to the opinion that he returned to England for a year or more and during which time he married and his wife did not arrive until 1644-5 or perhaps 1646." ³

The records of New Haven tell us that John signed the covenant of 'Civil Good' (appendix #7) in 1639, and knowing he was on the tax list and a member of the New Haven Church prior to his marriage, we can be sure he did make a return trip to England.

"Davenport and Eaton, with their company of two hundred and fifty, arrived at Boston on the 26th of June, 1637 . . . This was a notable accession to the strength of the colonists, both from the high character of the leaders and from the wealth and enterprise represented. Great efforts were made to have them remain permanently at Boston. But they had come for business as well as for convictions. They purposed to start an independent settlement and to found a commercial city.

"There was no need of haste, however. It was wise to gain a better understanding of the ground they were to occupy before going farther. So they sent on seven or their number to spend the winter and thoroughly examine the situation, while they tarried for the report. The best part of a year was passed in this way and it was the 30th of March, 1638, when they again embarked to complete their voyage.

"These were fruitful months. Think of how much it meant for these new comers to be associated, during all this time, with the tried veterans who had preceded them in the work of building settlements. What cheer it brought to the Massachusetts pioneers to greet in their homes these fresh arrivals from the dear old country! And how intensely interesting to the sojourners was this life of the colony, with its illustrations of what they themselves were to encounter, the problems they would have to meet and solve in the new community they were about to establish!

"The settlement was small as yet, numbering no more than a New England village of the present day, and providing for all these men, women and children must have given some share to every house. This speedily brought about a close familiarity. Children were playing together; youths and maidens were chatting merrily over their work, and the older people talked of business concerns, discussed the political aspect of things in England, or gravely argued on questions of theology.

"Those who have lived for any time in a frontier settlement of the present day know how free and spontaneous is the social life to be found there. We may suppose that it was not altogether different in this case. That sojourn in Boston of these settlers on their way to New Haven made them participants in all that was going on. For the time they were a part of that community, intering into its interests, forming acquaintances and cultivating friendships to continue through life.

"After this, the people of New Haven could not but cherish warm feelings toward those of Massachusetts Bay. And everything worked to perpetuate these feelings. That was the central point for all the Puritan colonies, the port of entry for shipping, the trading post, the metropolis, so far as there was any, on this side of the Atlantic. Intercourse was constant between the two places, and the settlers on the Sound were frequent visitors in the homes and among the people who had become so dear to them." 4

Going back to the account of incidents concerning the arrival of Rev. Davenport's flock to New Haven we find recorded:

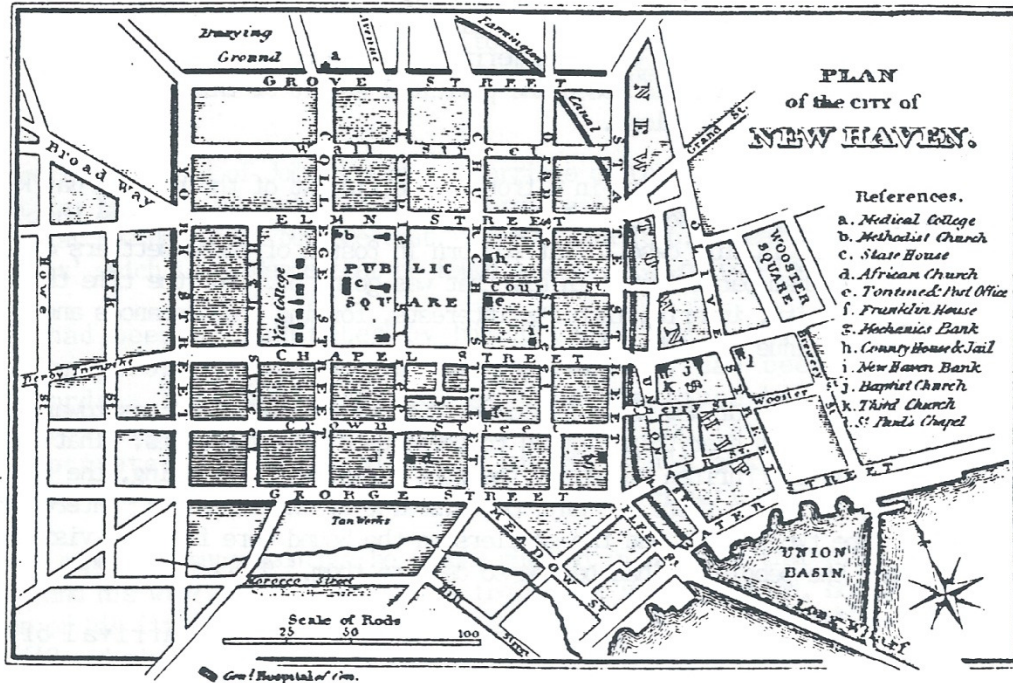
"On the Sunday following their arrival in 1638 the company assembled under the trees twice for public worship. Mr. Davenport preached from the text: 'Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit to be tempted of the Devil,' warning his hearers that even here temptations are to be encountered and the fight with Satan has not ended, though they have changed the battleground from London to the wilderness . . .

"Among their first acts they purchased from the Indians two tracts of land, one of which covered many miles on each side of the Quinnipiac River, extending northward ten miles. By a fair treaty and subsequent fair dealings the Colonists made firm friends of the Indians, and were never seriously molested. A town plan was laid out and house lots assigned to each planter, according to the size of families and the amount of estate on which he was able and willing to pay taxes.

"On June 4, 1639, a meeting of the free planters was held to consult about settling the civil government according to God, and the nominations of persons to office, by consent of all, fittest in all respects for the foundation work of a church to be gathered in Quinnipiac.

"At this meeting a covenant was entered into in a formal and very solemn manner (see appendix # 7). This covenant was signed by all the freeholders. Theophilus Eaton was elected

Governor, and reelected each year from 1638 until his death in 1657. John Brockett, a civil engineer and surveyor, was appointed to "lay out the large square in nine equal sections," also to lay out the 'neck of land.' Later, in the Colonial records, mention is made of the accuracy of the angles and the equality of the sections as laid out by him. These remain to this day (1905) unaltered in boundaries, and comprise what is now known as the New Haven Green and the grounds of Yale University.



"New Haven (Quinnipiac) was from the first a compactly settled town of more than one hundred and thirty families, and many of its inhabitants not only educated and refined but wealthy. New Haven excelled all the other plantations in New England in elegance and costliness of its domestic architecture." ⁵

Early records point to the extravagance of the settlers in their building of spacious homes that exceeded anything done by any other colony in New England at the time. It seemed their expectations were high and they were known to be building a kingdom for the return of the Savior. It was said that,

". . .the early settlers laid out too much of their stocks and estates in building of fair and stately houses, wherein at the first they outdid the rest of the country.

"Tradition reports that the house of Governor Theophilus Eaton was so large as to have nineteen fireplaces, and that it was lofty as well as large. Its principle apartment, dominated - as in the mother country - 'The Hall,' was the first to be entered. It was sufficiently spacious to accomodate the dining of a large family." ⁶

If the entrance hall was this large, one might wonder how large the main dining room, built to entertain groups of people, might have been.

It is without question that John Brockett and his wife and family lived the life of elegance while in New Haven. They no doubt had servants as did their wealthy neighbors, for it is stated that the passengers of the 'Hector' brought with them their servants as well as all of their movable goods and moneys.

"Family worship was an important feature of domestic life in a Puritan house-hold. It was important because of its frequency, regularity, and seriousness. Whenever the family came to the table for breakfast, dinner, or supper, there was a grace before the meat; and when they left it, a grace after meat, every person standing by his chair while the blessing was asked and the thanks were given. The day was begun with worship, which included the reading of scripture and prayer, and ended with a similar service, all standing during the prayer.

"The simple, regular life of a planters family was favorable to health. As compared with the present time, there was but little excitement. News from the homeland was communicated to the neighbors by 'letters of intelligence.' These were scarce but passed from hand to hand. Corn was husked and houses were 'raised' by neighborly kindness and help. The whole plantation sympathized with a family afflicted with sickness, and the neighbors assisted them in nursing and watching.

"Families entertained travelers after the manner of Christians of the first century, and highly prized their visits as opportunities for learning the news of the day . . .

"So careful were the townspeople in guarding the character of their new settlement that even the land which was appropriated to individuals as their private property was held under the condition that no sale was to be made to any stranger until the character of the proposed purchaser had been examined and approved by the town and leave granted by express vote for such transfer of land." ⁷

The restrictions in regard to the sale of property gave them a community of sterling integrity, religious character, and loyalty to each other and their community. Prosperity attended the colonists of New Haven and during the lifetime of John Brockett the settlements spread to include the town of Wallingford.

"John Brockett seems to have been one of the leading men of the company, as his name appears in the records of New Haven colony more often than any except that of Theophilus Eaton.

"He was a man of good judgment and one in whom the people had confidence as shown from the fact, that in cases of trouble, or difference of opinion, he was generally appointed by the Planters on a committee to adjust matters . . .

"In 1660 when differences arose between the Conn. Colony at Hartford, and the New Haven Colony, as to boundary lines John Brockett was appointed one of the Commission to settle the troubles . . .

"A few years later the Governor of New Jersey deputed John Brockett 'to lay out, survey, and bound the said bounds of Elizabeth Towne, the planting fields, town lots . . . for the avoiding of all controversies and disputes concerning the same, the Governor, having had certain notice of the good experience, knowledge, skill and faithfulness of John Brockett." ⁸

In order to perform this work, John Brockett removed temporarily to Elizabeth-town from 1667 until 1670. The first General Assembly of New Jersey convened in Elizabethtown in 1668 and John was chosen to represent the people in the House of Burgesses.

John and his wife did not remain in New Jersey after the New Haven Colony granted permission to settle a new area to the north (Wallingford). They returned to help in the endeavor of the settlers to found that new town. He was one of the founders of Wallingford as early as 1669 and took an active part in all civic affairs. He was closely associated with others who were called to assist in the responsibilities put upon the towns during King Philip's War.

To name but a few of John's many assignments of civic responsibility; 1647, appointed Inspector of roads, given many land grants in recognition of "time spent and service rendered to the colonists," appointed surgeon to the soldiers during 'King Phillip's War,' deputy to the General Courte of Conn. during the years 1671, 1678, 1680-82 and 1685. John Brockett was assigned to help settle the differences between the Colony at Hartford and the Colony of New Haven.

He and his wife moved to Wallingford after all of their children were born. Their house lot was "No. 1 at the extreme south end of the village 40 rods long and 20 rods wide, subsequently extending to Wharton's Brook. It was ordered that every planter should have, according to his rank, four, three or two acres of the choice land upon the River called 'hoppground.' Four acres on both sides of the river were granted to John thus showing that he was of the highest rank among the settlers. Other allotments of land were divided among the first 38 families, each receiving either 12 acres or 8 acres, and his son, John, 8 acres. (map #9)

". . .At this time wolves in thousands infested this more interior area, killing the cattle, carrying off the sheep and, by their unearthly howlings at night, added horrors to the location. The Indians, though friendly out of fear, were very numerous and unpredictable. The settlers, at no time, could feel assured that they were safe from harm.

"Feb. 15, 1675 was observed as a day of fasting in Wallingford, with reference to the organization of a church, and 13 settlers were designated (John Brockett being one of the number) who decided "that there be a church of Christ gathered to walk according to the Congregational way" - Puritan. 9

It is interesting to note that others of our ancestors, whose accounts are found in this collection, were also associated with John Brockett and among the early settlers of Wallingford at this particular time. Mention is made of "an Indian deed dated May 24, 1681, that gave to John Brockett, John Peck (7-73), and John Moss (7-74) a block of land two miles in breadth east and west, and fully the length of said town of Wallingford bounds." 10 All three of these men had acquired extensive land holdings. John Brockett was indeed a man of wealth in terms of land properties. His lands spread over parts near Elizabethtown, New Jersey, New Haven and Wallingford in Conn. (map #9) Some of his properties had been assigned him as reward for his surveying efforts between the years 1645 and 1660. Through his familiarity with the land in his work he had been able to choose such grounds as would be desirable to acquire.

"In the establishment of Wallingford we find adopted many principles and laws which satisfied the religious sentiments of its people, and which greatly influenced the lives of the residents and their descendants, and, of course affected the descendants of John Brockett and his wife. While such laws seem, at this day, unnecessary, they demonstrate that the early settlers regarded character as of more importance than money, and this led to the gathering in Wallingford of men of such sterling integrity and religious principles that for several generations their descendants were greatly influenced thereby, and their moral tone was notably good. In this new settlement John Brockett at once became one of the leading men, and was called to fill many public offices and, after the incorporation, for many years, represented the town in the General Assembly." 11

John Brockett died in Wallingford at the age of 80 years. He made his Will March 3, 1690 and nine days later he passed on, March 12, 1690. No mention is made of his wife in his Will so it can be assumed she preceded him in death. It is sad that so little can be said of her but she bore nine children and left England, a well established land, to be faithful to a man whose mission it was to build the foundation of a new and righteous Empire. Beside a man of such stature, integrity, and success, there must have stood a staunch, courageous and good woman. Without knowing her name let us honor her with the words of this poem:

A perfect woman, nobly planned
To warn, to comfort, to command;
And yet a spirit still and bright
With something of an angel's light.

The DAR listing of the children of John Brockett and his Puritan wife is the same as that given by Edward J. Brockett:

- "1. John Brockett, b. 1642, died 1720; md. Elizabeth Doolittle
2. Benjamin Brockett, b. 23 Feb. 1645, New Haven; died 1645
3. Be Faithful Brockett, twin of Benjamin (above) b. and d. 23 Feb. 1645
4. Mary Brockett, b. 25 Sept. 1646; md. Ephraim Pennington
5. Silence Brockett, b. 4 Jan. 1648; md. 25 Oct. 1667, Joseph Bradley
(7-77)
6. Benjamin Brockett, b. Dec/ 1648; md. Elizabeth Barnes
7. Abigail Brockett, b. 10 Mar. 1650; md. 22 Jan. 1673 - John Payne
8. Samuel Brockett, b. 14 Jan. 1652; md. 23 May 1682, Sarah Bradley (7-76)
9. Jabez Brockett, b. 24 Oct. 1656; md. Dorothy Lyman" 12

Wills have not often been a part of the reviews given of our ancestors because of their burdensome length, but they often reveal a man's concern for his family and the emphasis which they placed upon the sanctity of that institution, the home. John's Will was not that long so it might be acceptable to enter it here:

"I, John Brockett, of the town of Wallingford, being sound in Body yet having a composed good understanding and memory. I do make and ordain this my last Will and Testament in manner following.

"I give to my eldest son, John Brockett, all my lands and housing that I have not given deeds of gift, or now sold and all such meadows.

"Also I give unto my grandchild John Brockett that lives with me two oxen - furthermore I give to my son John the one-half of my moveable estate.

"Of the other quarter I give to my son Samuel 5 pounds sterling. Also to my son Jabez two oxen cart and plow. Also my son Benjamin and two daughters 20 shillings each.

"To my daughter Mary Pennington 20 shillings also to John Payne (married Abigail) 20 shillings and in case there should not be enough in this quarter part moveables to pay my debts and funeral charges and these legacies, what wants must be taken out of the forementioned moveable estate.

"Furthermore I give to my son John my wearing apparel and also appoint him to be my executor unto this Will and Testament.

March 3, 1689/90 13

The year of John's death (1690) saw Wallingford furnishing her quota of troops for the French and Indian Wars and soon thereafter in 1694, for the defense of Albany, N.Y. Taxes, paid in common with other colonial towns for the defense of New York and Massachusetts, amounted to an enormous burden; so that at the close of the year 1695 the colony of Wallingford had drawn from the pockets of the people and paid out seven thousands of pounds. We cannot but admire the self sacrificing spirit of the citizens, especially when we remember that they submitted to this heavy drain from England with the most unselfish motives that ever actuated a people.

As we consider the great contributions that John Brockett made in efforts to settle New Haven, Elizabethtown, and Wallingford, it is evident that this man was destined to greater accomplishments than had he remained in the sheltered life of his father's estate. He was a son that any father could be proud.

1. #79, pp. 13, 14
2. #71, pp. 33, 34
3. ibid, pp. 34, 35
4. #34, pp. 135, 136
5. #79, pp. 14, 15
6. ibid, p. 16
7. ibid, pp. 16, 18
8. ibid, p. 24
9. ibid, pp. 27-29
10. ibid, p. 29
11. ibid, pp. 28, 29
12. ibid, p. 30, also #71, pp. 35, 36
13. #71, pp. 36, 37 and #79, p. 31