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THE NELSON FAMILY
of
PLYMOUTH
MIDDLEBORO and LAKEVILLE
MASSACHUSETTS

A Geneological and Biographical Record
and
Family History Story

by

W. RIPLEY NELSON

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of

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

"The history of Middleboro is that of an inland town of the Old Colony, remote from any business center, a simple story of events, not so stirring as to seriously affect the history of the Commonwealth, a story of men, thrifty, intelligent, and able, who have contributed their share to the advancement of the best interests of the country". Thus reads the opening paragraph of the introduction to the "History of the Town of Middleboro, Massachusetts" by Thomas Weston, A.M. published in 1906. It is quoted as it seems to the writer equally applicable to the "History of the Nelson Family" of which the first forebear in America, William Nelson, was one of the original twenty-six purchasers in 1662 of the land which became the "Town of Middlebury" in 1669. It should in justice be added that the same statement is equally applicable to the women of the family-both those who married "out of it" and those who married "into it".

Comparing this family with others of outstanding fame in the Revolution and other wars of the Colonies and the Nation, a member of the family said: "The Nelsons were probably patriots but not fighters". But when one relives the lives of the members of all branches of the family one cannot help but take exception to this statement that they were not fighters. True, there were relatively few who directly participated in the life of the armed forces but those who did have outstanding records. The fighting quality, however, is ever present and is found in their devotion to the welfare of their fellow men which in every generation is evidenced by not one but several members active, constructive and prominent in religious, community and business leadership. It is a record of which any family may well be proud.

This book, written in a "homespun" manner as an intimate history of a family for its members rather than as a strictly factual genealogical record, is based upon provable facts, almost without exception and not on mere fiction or surmise. Family legends, stories and comments of individuals are included for the history would not be complete without them but, as such, they are clearly labelled.

It is a history of the Nelson family of Plymouth, Middleboro and Lakeville, descendants of William Nelson of Plymouth, but it deals primarily with the Middleboro-Lakeville branch of the family. The Plymouth branch descended from John Nelson, son of William, has not been traced beyond John Nelson, except to show a chart of his descendants as constructed from the genealogical record in "Ancient Land Marks of Plymouth" by Davis.

Collateral branches are referred to whenever possible with comments as to sources of information to be consulted for further data but these references are by no means all inclusive. In a number of instances descendants bearing name other than Nelson are included in the history because of their known continued close relationship to members of the family bearing the Nelson name.

In studying the history of the first several generations, family historians have been confused by what appears to be persons of the same name or one person owning land, living and being active in town offices in both Plymouth and Middleboro and nearby towns. This confusion is understandable, for, as is pointed out in the History of the Town of Middleboro, although the latter was only fifteen miles from Plymouth it was more than forty years before the whites came to dwell there in large numbers. It is further pointed out that for fifteen years after the early settlers came to Middleboro to live the territory was a part of Plymouth, and they were described as residents of Plymouth. But after the incorporation of Middleboro in 1669 they were known as "residing in Middleberry". Many who came to "Middleberry" also retained their land in Plymouth.

Then came King Philip's war -1675-76 -when all the whites fled from Middleboro back to Plymouth and their houses and all town records were destroyed. In the subsequent return to Middleboro numerous changes in the residents and land ownership took place. Instances of sons of the same name as their fathers but rarely distinguished by "Jr." and "Senior" coming with their fathers and then taking over the latter's lands etc. has brought about further confusion. The William, John, Samuel, Ebenezer and Thomas Nelsons are excellent examples of this confusion but it is believed that intensive research has eliminated much of this error with respect to the Nelson family as evidenced by the facts presented in this history.

Prior to the writing of this history the Nelson family story has been told only in fragmentary form and only as to certain branches, the one exception being found in "Ancestral Echoes" written in memorandum form by the late Dr. Abiel Ward Nelson formerly of New London, Conn., and the "Nelson Genealogy" prepared at the same time by him. These two works, which by chance came into the hands of the writer a number of years ago, can be credited as the incentive for the writing of this history. Dr. Nelson's research was painstaking and for the most part accurate but there were many blank spots. Most of these have now been filled in due to the cooperation of many trusting relatives completely unknown to the writer before undertaking this project, and to the help given by various authorities hereinafter mentioned.

Clifton W. Nelson, who still owns and lives on part of the old Nelson farmland at Lakeville, provided valuable information but more particularly key leads which, when followed, opened up heretofore untouched wells of information. It was he who introduced the writer to Harold Nelson Gibbs of Barrington, Rhode Island, who produced a gold mine of memos, letters, deeds, diaries, account books, tombstone records and family charts, etc. including those collected over a period of many years by Miss Mary Luella Nelson, and her cousin, Florence Wright, which had never been tabulated into any related picture.

Miss Dorothea Nelson of Marshfield has provided the history of another branch of the family apparently lost when her forebear, Job Nelson, left Middleboro for Castine, Maine in 1795.

Mr. Arthur S. Maynard of the Library Committee of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society has been a staunch friend in producing for the writer books, records and suggestions which have been of inestimable value.

Miss Clara Parker, Librarian of the Atheneum of Nantucket, Mass., has provided many a lead in old New England and Plymouth Colony records. Her knowledge of early American genealogy helped solve the way out of many a blind alley.

Smatterings of information have been picked up from many Town, County and historical records of which the "History of the Town of Middleboro, Massachusetts" by Thomas Weston probably proved the most informative. "Ancient Landmarks of Plymouth" by Davis also proved of great value but even with these authoritative works it was found necessary to reexamine the data presented so as to reconcile it with other sources of information.

This history is probably only a starter for a complete story of the Nelson family of Plymouth, Middleboro and Lakeville, and likely it is subject to correction as may be found by those who have data not available to the writer. While no promise is made as to the issuance of an amended or enlarged history based upon data obtained after publication be assured that the writer will welcome receipt of any information which will correct, or add to the story as told in this volume.

If each and every member of the Nelson family experiences on reading this History even half the feeling of growing pride in ones family as the writer experienced in preparing this History the effort and work of three years will have been well spent and repaid. It is a good humble family with a solid record of achievement in many walks of life but throughout its history conscious of its obligations to community and fellowmen.

May the generations to come bear steadfastly in mind that the world does not owe them a living but that they, each in turn, will owe much to the world for the privilege of living. The heritage of the family will then be assured as the incentive for the future.

W. Ripley Nelson

NOTATION: The writing of this history was completed in 1952 but its publication was not completed until the end of 1963. No attempt has been made to make corrections and for additions covering the interim years between 1953 and 1963 inclusive.

PART 1

ENGLISH FOREBEARS
and
OTHER NELSON FAMILIES in AMERICA

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ENGLISH FOREBEARS

and

OTHER NELSON FAMILIES in AMERICA

Many persons who become interested in Genealogical records attempt jumps over impossible hurdles to complete a "family tree" and this is especially true in the attempts to forge links between those whom emigrated to the American colonies and prominent families of English history. The writer of this family history has made no attempt to go beyond William Nelson of Plymouth, the first forebear in the American colonies, of the Nelsons of Plymouth, Middleboro and Lakeville.

For the benefit of those who might wish to attempt earlier explorations quotations are made from notes left as a result of extensive research by the late Dr. Abiel Ward Nelson (7th Generation) the first said to be

From the N.Y. Tribune --July 6, 1895

"A bronze tablet is now being cast for the Pilgrim Society of Plymouth Massachusetts which will be sent to Scrooby, England. It will bear the following inscription: 'This Tablet is Erected By The Pilgrim Society of Plymouth Massachusetts, United States of America, To Mark The Site Of The Ancient Manor-House Where Lived William Brewster From 1588 to 1608 And Where He Organized The Pilgrim Church Of Which He Became The Ruling Elder And With Which In 1608 He Moved To Amsterdam: In 1609 To Leyden And In 1620 To Plymouth Where He Died April 16, 1644.' This Tablet was set up Nov. 1895 by William T. Davis of Plymouth, Mass; being attached to the farm-house erected on the spot of the Manor-House, also called the Bishop's Palace, and having its beams, or some of them, from the timbers of the old Manor-House. The occupant of the farm-house now 1895 by a singular coincidence, is William Brewster-not a descendant of Elder Brewster.

William Brewster, the Elder of the Plymouth Church, was Post Master of Scrooby from 1588 to 1608. Post-masters then had Post-horses to let, their own or those of others for the use of the King's messengers, and incidentally they had charge of letters and their delivery.

He was usually an inn-keeper and a subordinate of the farmer or contractor who sub-contracted with him. The office was worth 40% to 50% a year.

William Brewster was succeeded as post-master successively by Francis Hall John Nelson William Nelson and Edward Wright. Edward Wright was post-master in the time of the Commonwealth--1649-1660 and probably before and after.

William Brewster, the Elder of the Plymouth Church did not administer the communion at Plymouth, as he was advised not to by the Pastor John Robinson who remained and died at Leyden. The Rev. Mr. Lombard, now 1895 Pastor of Brewster's Church, says the communion was not given till 1630 when Ralph Smith was ordained pastor.

This church, the church of the first settlers of Plymouth, became Unitarian in 1800, upon the decease of the Rev. Dr. Robbins long time its pastor.

The first settlers of Plymouth emigrating from Leyden came originally from Scrooby or its vicinity."

Dr. Nelson established William Nelson (1st Generation) in Plymouth in 1633 and that subsequently in 1637 he was "hyred" to keep the "cows", an important post in the Plymouth colony, and from these facts he offered the following suggestion:

"It may be suspected that this William Nelson (1) 1633 was a son or quite as probably a brother of John Nelson Post-Master of Scrooby second after William Brewster, and himself post-master also, or he might have been son of the W. Nelson P.M. of Scrooby. He was certainly on good terms and one of the elect of the Pilgrims. And his office of Cow-Keeper then important may well have succeeded to that of Post-Master of Scrooby".

Scrooby may be found on a map of England at approximately the northernmost tip of Nounity Nottinghamshire; almost directly east of the city of Sheffield and on an almost direct line between the cities of Sheffield and Gainsborough.

While it seems to be an established fact that William Nelson was in Plymouth in 1633 the exact date of arrival and the ship in which he came does not seem to be established but Dr. Nelson's comments are:

"In 1635 the James brought to the colony 100 passengers, 23 cows, 8 mares.

The Angel Gabriel consort of the James was wrecked but the people were saved and most of the cargo, of that, an appletree in a pot, planted at York, Maine, still growing in 1880. In 1630 came the Hand-Maid under John Grant-- 12 weeks from Southampton, 20 cows, 10 died, about 60 passengers all well-- rear-guard from Leyden, among them the Eddys.

William Nelson (1) may have come in the Hand-Maid."

The words "rear-guard" from Leyden" would lend strength to this suggestion for William Nelson when he came to America was Single and possibly single men were, so to speak, "fitted in" without record on these voyages. In "Saints and Strangers" by George F. Willison on page 454 there is given a Summary of "The Pilgrim Company" and the ships and passengers they brought. The Hand Maid is listed with 60 passengers, all unidentified. Another possible explanation has been suggested by a well known official of one of our leading Genealogical Societies. Persons who refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to the King were permitted to take passage to America, but were refused listing as passengers or in the Manifest of the ships transporting the emigrants. In another tabulation of emigrants two Nelsons are listed-- "Thomas Nelson, Ship ? Rowley" and "William Nelson"--no ship--no destination, which would seem to bear out this suggestion.

Dr. Nelson made another sortie direct to Leyden, Holland on which his notes read as follows:

"There was also a Robert Nelson of the Congregation of Leyden, but he was too young to be father of Wm. Nelson (1). A letter from Leyden shows this:

Seal "26th of April, 1895.

Gemeente

Archief

Leiden

Dear Sir:- Truly I regret that the only Nelson I find in the Leiden records is the Robert you know. Perhaps you know also his marriage act dated 27th of August 1622. Robert Nelson bacyworker (a sort of cloth drapier) young man from England assisted by Roger Wilkyn His friend and Engeltgen Gilten girl from England, assisted by Margerite Wilkyn her friend.

If I ever find your ancestor I promise you that I'll communicate it to you, but as you have no proof that he ever visited at Leiden I doubt that this has been the case.

Yours truly

(signed) Ch. M. Dozy. "

Mr. Dozy is the learned and kindly antiquary of Leyden".

Dr. Nelson further comments:

" A Robert Nelson, this Robert possibly only if he married a second wife however, married a daughter of Sir John or Sir William Temple, and lived or settled in Boston and died old in 1689, and being the father of Captain John Nelson, very prominent in Colonial affairs in Boston and Castine, taken prisoner at Quebec, and many years held by the French.

Temple was Governor of the Massachusetts Colony for a considerable period, being uncle or cousin of Captain John Nelson."

From facts of record there seems little likelihood that the Robert Nelson of the Congregation of Leyden is the Robert Nelson "who lived or settled in Boston and died old in 1689". The latter probably would be Robert Nelson of Gray's Inn, Middlesex, England, who died before 1698 and who was the son of Robert Nelson of St. Bernard's Inn, County Middlesex, England, buried in St. Dunstan's-in-the-West, London, Dec. 21, 1641.

Robert Nelson of Gray's Inn married Mary Temple, sister of Sir Thomas Temple, Governor of Nova Scotia. Robert and Mary Temple Nelson had children--Temple, Margaret and John. This would appear to be the Capt. John Nelson referred to for this John was born in England in 1654, came to New England 1680; one of the Committee of Safety, Boston, Mass. 1689; lead an attack on Governor Andros, 1689; captured in Canada by the Franch in 1691; confined in the Castle of Angouleme, France 1692-4; prisoner in the Bastille 1694-7; warden of Christ Church, Boston 1705-07; died in Boston.

The writer of this history has found no connection between Robert Nelson or John Nelson of Boston and the Nelsons of Plymouth, Middletown and Lakeville. It should be borne in mind too that County Middlesex, England, is adjacent to London far south of Scrooby.

Thomas Nelson, one of the wealthiest of twenty men who came with their families from Rowley, county Yorkshire, England, and who settled in Rowley, Mass. in 1638 has been suggested as a relative and thus an English connection. The writer has been unable to find any such connection, in fact, has a letter which would disprove it. This letter dated Georgetown, May 8th, 1854 is addressed to Rev. W.F. Nelson, Greenfield, Mass. and is signed Sylvanus Nelson who confirms the arrival in Rowley 1638 of his forbear Thomas Nelson with his wife Joan and two sons, Philip and Thomas. He gives the family genealogy but also makes the comment: "We have never in this section supposed that we belonged to the Plymouth stock as it is not known that our ancestor Thomas Nelson had a brother"..... Further confirmation of this history of the Nelsons of Rowley is found in genealogical records of New England.

Thomas Nelson, merchant of Penrith, Scotland, emigrated to Virginia the latter part of the 17th century. He founded Yorktown and was the ancestor of the Virginia Nelsons. There is no relationship apparent with the Nelsons of Plymouth, Middleboro and Lakeville.

The great Admiral Lord Nelson (Horatio) was born at Burnham-Thorpe, county Norfolk, England - fifty miles east of Scrooby - the son of Rev. Edward Nelson. But as Lord Nelson was not born until Sept. 29, 1758 and unmarried when killed at Trafalgar Oct. 21, 1805 "collateral descent" is the only remotely possible relationship as suggested by Dr. Abiel Ward Nelson. The latter does say that some of "our Nelsons were named after him", -namely Horatio (7) son of Judge Job Nelson (6) and Horatio(7) grandson of Colonel John Nelson (5).

There is another large family of Nelsons who settled in New York State whose genealogy is on file with the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. It has been reviewed by the writer but there seems to be no relationship past or present.

And so let us begin our history with our first forbear in this country, William Nelson of Plymouth, as of the date of his first appearance in the colony.

PART 11

FIRST through FIFTH

GENERATIONS

See CHART A.

PART 11

FIRST through FIFTH

GENERATIONS

See CHART A.

PART 11

FIRST through FIFTH GENERATIONS.

This Part covers the Nelson family of Plymouth, Middleboro and Lakeville from the first Generation in America through the Fifth Generation based upon data located and compiled to date of this history. It also contains brief data regarding the origin and descendants of the Nelsons who remained in Plymouth and are referred to as the Plymouth Branch of the Nelson family.

The family history is recorded in this Part by generations and not by the various family branches. The individuals are linked as to descent, the forbears being given by generations as indicated by the numeral after each name.

The persons recorded in this Part 11 will be found on "Chart A". The numeral appearing before an individual's name is the chart number for that name thus insuring ready reference between the text and the charts.

In Part 11 there are five chapters, namely:

Chapter I	First Generation	pages	12	to	24	incl.
Chapter II	Second Generation	"	25	"	36	"
Chapter III	Third Generation	"	37	"	44	"
Chapter IV	Fourth Generation	"	45	"	48	"
Chapter V	Fifth Generation	"	49	"	64	"