

The MERRILL BULLETIN

Devoted to Early American History of the Merrill Family.

NOVEMBER 1940

No. I

MR. MERRILL - WHERE DID YOU COME FROM?

WHAT is the origin of the Merrill family? What is the origin of the name? These are questions of interest to all Merrills, and questions which we would like to be able to answer with factual and authentic proof. However - the conscientious genealogist when faced with unsupported and-unverified data, will so state it. As the answer to those two questions, still remains in doubt, we can only at this time place before you some of the "possible" answers which have been advanced.

Various articles have been written-various, conclusions have been drawn, some of them very plausible and we will give them to you for exactly what they are worth.

Probably the most generally accepted theory, is that the family came from the French Huguenot family of DeMerle, members of which family escaped to England after St. Bartholomew Day August 1572 in order to save their lives at the time of religious persecution in France.

This DeMerle family is reputed to have belonged to the Auvergne nobility and to have had vast ancestral estates near Place-de-Dombes. How many of this family made their way to England, or their names is not known. It is reasoned that the family shortly after arrival in England anglicized their name to Merrell or Merrill

Other writers point out that while this may be true insofar as this family coming from England and changing their name to Merrill, there is no direct evidence that they are the ancestors of the American family.

These same writers point out that families of this or similar spelling of the name, were in England hundreds of years before these DeMerles arrived in England.

As far back as Edward 1 (1272-1307) there is in the records of Norfolk mention of a John and a Richard Miriel. Also about this same time; Adam de Miriel in Suffolk (and he is a man to be especially kept in mind when we discuss the ancestors of Nathaniel of Newbury). There was a Nicholas de Meriel in Yorkshire and in 1388, a Sampson Meurrill - this was probably the man known as Sampson Meverell, Knight (1388-1462).

Going back to a still earlier date. 1086 in the Domesday Book appears a Morel - still earlier, back to the time of the Norman Invasion we find a Hugo de Moruile a Knight in the army of William the Conqueror who received certain grants of land in consideration of his services.

These might be the ancestors of American pioneers. When we investigate the origin of the name we encounter a very similar situation, and arrive at the same result, namely no positive knowledge.

Surnames as a general rule were chosen from occupation, location or characteristics and while various attempts have been made to identify the family through the name origin none of the theories advanced are sufficiently logical to admit of actual adoption as true.

Somewhere in this hazy background, lies the true origin of the family and it is not until we find and definitely locate the grandfather of Nathaniel of Newbury, that we find our feet on terra firma.

Most of the early records of Nathaniel say that he came to America from Salisbury County, some even going so far as to say that he was born there while it is possible that he was living in Salisbury County just before leaving for America.

Sufficient, tangible proof to show that he was not born there, that he was in fact, born in the little Parish of Wherstead about three miles from Ipswich in Suffolk County.

From Parish baptismal records and Wills, it is established that one John Merrell and wife Prudence, had, among other children a son Nathaniel.

Nathaniel (2) married Mary Blacksole (Possibly this name was misspelled in copying and should be Blacknall) and among the children of this couple were:

John-baptized August 16, 1599, Nathaniel-baptized May 4 1601. And these two, John and Nathaniel, are unquestionably the John and Nathaniel of Newbury.

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But-as to the ancestors of John (1)-we do not know. From point of time, the DeMerle family could have been his ancestors, so too, could have been any of the others. However, we feel that the following while not evidence is at least, suggestive.

It was the practice for family estates in England to remain in the family generation after generation. Ipswich is located in Suffolk County. As we have seen, one Adam de Miriel was registered in Suffolk County 1272-1307. It is a reasonable hypothesis that this John, the grandfather of Nathaniel may have descended in this line and this property in Suffolk County may have been part, at least of an old family estate.

It is true of course that members of the DeMerele family could have acquired property in Suffolk County, so in fact could any member of the family, and while the fact that Adam de Miriel was in Suffolk County and John the Grandfather of Nathaniel was also in Suffolk County does not offer proof of relationship, it does suggest a possibility.

The final answer however remains and that is that up to the present time we do not know the ancestors of Nathaniel back of his grandfather John.

And of the ancestors of Richard of Staten Island we know still less as all of the data thus available is that his English home was Warwickshire.

It is hoped that in time, more data may be obtained on this English ancestry.

If you have information regarding any old Merrill documents or bits of Merrill history we will be glad to pass it along in the Merrill Bulletin with your name as the source, provided we think it would interest other members of the family.

We have been asked whether it is possible to secure an individual Direct Line Schedule back to the first American Merrill. This, in the Nathaniel line, we can generally supply if we have the name of your Merrill grandfather and the maiden name of his wife.

These schedules, showing names, dates and notation of Revolutionary service, if any, may be had for five dollars.

Applications completed for membership in Daughters of the American Revolution, and other patriotic societies.

JOHN AND NATHANIEL MERRILL OF NEWBURY, MASS

THE exact date on which these two brothers came to America or the boat on which they T came is unknown. One writer has suggested that they came on the Hector, in 1633, but of that we have no proof.

We do know that they came here about that time, though possibly not until 1634 -- that they stayed for a year or two in Ipswich, Mass, and then joined the new settlement at Newbury, where they both acquired property.

Of John Merrill, the older brother of Nathaniel, we are little concerned, since he had no sons. He married prior to leaving England, and had a daughter Hannah who married Stephen Sweet.

Since John had no sons, there are accordingly no Merrill descendants from him.

The marriage of Nathaniel, like that of his coming to America is shrouded in mystery. The most logical conclusion appears to be that he married in England and that the first son, Nathaniel Jr. was born there and that he was a year or less old, when they came to America.

The wife of Nathaniel was Susanna. Her last name has been the cause of much speculation. Early record gave it as Jordan, but that was proved to be false as Jordan was the name of her second husband, whom she married after the death of Nathaniel.

The most logical supposition, but only a supposition, is that her maiden name was Wilterton or Wolterton and that she was the sister of the George Wilterton of Hartford, Connecticut, who adopted John Merrill, son of Nathaniel and Susanna and made him his heir.

It was, oddly enough, bequests made by George Wilterton in his will to relatives in Ipswich, England, which led to the discovery of the ancestors of John and Nathaniel. Thus in view of all the various factors, most authorities today, though without definite proof, feel reasonably sure that the wife of Nathaniel was Susanna Wilterton and that her family lived in or near Ipswich, England. It is probable that sometime around 1636 to 1638 Nathaniel built his first house in Newbury and started the operation of his farm. It is interesting to note that such common commodities to us as Potatoes and Tea, were unknown to the people in those days as it was not until about 1720 that they were introduced.

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Fish, pork and game were their principal meats while turnips their main vegetable, beans also were much used, especially to make the famous Bean porridge. And in those early days, musket balls were used largely as currency.

Nathaniel Merrill appears to have been a sober, industrious, solid, substantial God fearing man. While he took an active part in the community, at all times doing his share and his duty, he does not appear to have aspired to or to have held the various public offices such as did many of the others.

That he and his family were held in high regard and esteem is evidenced by the associationship of the families, the sons and grandsons of Nathaniel married into such notable families as Webster, Chase, Morse, Emery, Bartlett and others.

In this issue we will set down the schedule of the children of Nathaniel and in the next issue we will take up these in further detail. Nathaniel as stated was baptized at Wherstead (near Ipswich) England on May 4, 1601 and died at Newbury, Mass., March 16, 1654.

Susanna his wife died, January 15, 1672. The children of Nathaniel and Susanna were as follows

Nathaniel, Jr:

b. prob. Eng., about 1633 34 d. Newbury, January, 1682.; married Joanna Ninian (or Ninny pos. Kinney).

John:

b. Newbury abt. 1635 d. Hartford Ct., July 18, 1712; married Sarah Watson.

Abraham:

b. Newbury, abt. 1636 d. Newbury, Nov. 28, 1722; married (1) Abigail Webster, d. Aug 12, 1712, (2) Sarah Bond, (nee Clements).

Susanna:

b. Newbury abt. 1640; married John Burbanks.

Daniel:

b. Newbury Aug. 20 1642. d. Salisbury, June 27, 1717. married (1) Sarah Clough d. Mar. 25, 1705 (2) Sarah Page (nee Morrill). Abel.

b. Newbury, Feb. 20, 1643, d. Newbury, Oct. 28, 1689; married Priscilla Chase.

GALLANT JOHN WATSON

Tradition has an interesting story concerning John Watson, father of Sarah Watson, wife of John Merrill (2).

On the same boat on which the Watson family came to America, there was a charming young lady named Margaret (Peggy) Smith, who one day fell overboard. Young Watson immediately plunged into the water and saved her and she later became his wife.

RICHARD MERRILL OF STATEN ISLAND, N. Y.

THE first records of Richard Merrill appear to be of his settlement in Northfield, Staten Island, about 1675. He is reported to have been born in 1642 and died in 1727, and that he had married in England, Sarah Wells, born in 1649. This family is reported to have come to America from Warwickshire, England, but what relationship existed between them and the Newbury branch has not as yet been determined.

That some relationship did exist is apparent, since in the archives of this branch the Coat of Arms Except for one color, with that of the Coat of Arms which was used by Thomas Merrill, (a grandson of Nathaniel) on a Deed which he executed, in 1726.

In our next issue we plan to go into this family more in detail, for like the Newbury family, its history has many things of interest, many characters of interest, including the justly famous Capt. Benj. Merrill, one of the early martyrs for freedom and independence. It was this brave Capt. Benj. Merrill, who with a group of others gave battle to the tyrannical Governor Tyron of South Carolina. In this battle Capt. Merrill was captured and by order of the Governor was tried for treason. As was certain to be the case, he was convicted and hung in 1771, but his death might well be compared with Lexington in its effect upon the people of that time.

As advised in this issue we will merely give the family of Richard and Sarah and take up the next generation and its activities in the next issue.

Children of Richard and Sarah Wells Merrill were:

William, married Grace -----. Richard, married Elsie Dorlant. Thomas, married Jennie Gewan. Philip, married Elizabeth Baker. John, married Gertrude Simonson.

In our next issue we will relate an interesting incident in the life of Stephen Merrill, great-great-grandson of Nathaniel, how he went to his own funeral.

There will also be an article on the Indian raid in Newbury.

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MERRILL

Devoted to Early American History of the Merrill Family.

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HENRY TALCOTT CARPENTER, Editor *Historian - Genealogist*

EDITORIAL: IN this little unpretentious Bulletin, we have endeavored to lay the foundation on which to build for you a clear picture of your early American background. Our subsequent issues, scheduled for December, January and February will carry on in chronological order a record of the family and its activities, thus when the four issues are complete you will have an authentic picture of your American ancestry.

We who are descendants from these early pioneers, (and one of "ye" editor's lines runs back to Nathaniel) have reason to be thankful. In such lineage there is justifiable pride. There is too an obligations duty to our children and our children's children to leave for them a record of their ancestry.

This task which we have undertaken is, we feel, very much worth while. If in this you concur, then your support will be gratefully appreciated.

Henry Talcott Carpenter, Editor

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THE MERRILL COAT OF ARMS

IN determining an authentic Coat of Arms of a family, one guide which has proved its value time and again, is when a Coat of Arms has been found to have been used by original pioneers of their family.

These are frequently found on some document or engraved on silver or often cut and reproduced on a grave stone.

In the case of the Merrill Coat of Arms, we find supporting proof of authenticity on a Deed, executed by Thomas Merrill, (grandson of Nathaniel). This Deed was sealed with wax, on which was an impression of what was unquestionably the Merrill Coat of Arms. A reproduction of this is shown herewith. It is inconceivable that Thomas would have used this if it had not belonged to his family.

Still further proof is found in the archives of the Staten Island Branch, which describes in detail this very same Coat of Arms. Three peacocks heads on the shield and one for the crest.

The only difference between the two is that in the technical description as given in the Staten Island records the background of the shield is given as Silver while that on the seal used by Thomas definitely specifies gold for the shield background.

In the reproduction of the seal used by Thomas, the technical heraldic marking indicating gold is very distinctly shown. We doubt if Thomas would have known the meaning of this technical marking. We feel that he used the Coat of Arms which had been in his family without change.

Hence as this definitely shows gold, we, in our reproductions make this background gold instead of silver.

The symbolic meaning of a peacocks head, in Heraldry is, in a broad sense, all that is fine and noble, destroys that which is base and low.

The motto - "*Vincet Qui Patitur*" is translated as "*He Conquers Who Endures*".

"He only deserves to be remembered by posterity who treasures up and preserves the history of his ancestors." Edmund Burke.

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