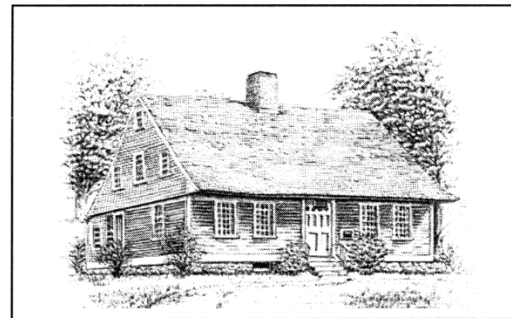


THE HAMDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Spring 2022



John Hampden in America

The town of Hamden is named for John Hampden (1594-1643), an English parliamentarian who challenged monarchical authority and a puritan leader who supported Cromwell during the English Civil War. He died leading a cavalry charge against royalist forces in the battle of Chalgrove Field. After the American Revolution, when the northern reaches of New Haven were incorporated into a separate town--so area lore states--the name of "Hamden" was suggested by Amasa Bradley (1769-1827), whose ancestor, William Bradley, had served with Hampden.

Hampden seems like a faraway figure. But it is possible that as a young man he actually visited New England and later was one of the individuals to whom a patent was given for land in the Connecticut River Valley. In his tract entitled *Good Newes from New England* (1622), Plimoth colony member and agent Edward Winslow related his visit to the Wampanoag *massasoit*, or leader, whose name was Ousamequin. During March 1623, Winslow records, "newes came to *Plimoth*, that *Massassowat* was like to die . . . Now it being a commendable manner of the Indians, when any (especially of note) are dangerously sicke, for all that professe friendship to them, to visit them in their extremitie, either in their persons, or else to send some acceptable persons to them, therefore it was thought meet (being a good and warrantable action) that as wee had euer professed friendship, so wee should now maintaine the same, by obseruing this their laudable custome . . . To that end my selfe hauing formerly beene there, . . . the Gouvernour [William Bradford] . . . laid this seruice vpon my selfe, and fitted mee with some cordials to administer to him."

As remarkable as this incident was, Winslow goes on to say that he had "one Master *John Hamden* a Gentleman of *London* (who then wintered with vs, and desired much to see the Countrey) for my Consort." On their way to his village, however, hearing that Ousemaquin was dead, Winslow debated whether it would not be diplomatic to visit the heir apparent, Corbitant. "I resolved to put it in practise," Winslow recounted, "if Master *Hamden* and *Hobbamock* durst attempt it with mee, whom I found willing to that or any other course might tend to the generall good." They subsequently learned that Massasoit Ousamequin was indeed alive, but barely; hastening to him, Winslow and "Hamden" were able to cure him.

This enigmatic figure appears yet again in the early chronicles of colonized New England. In 1622, one Phineas Pratt, a joiner by trade, came to New England on the *Sparrow* to establish a settlement in what is now Weymouth, Massachusetts. That winter, he learned of a Native plan to attack Plimoth, and he set off to warn them. Traveling on foot, he lost his way, and thereby was able quite by accident to evade his pursuers. Pratt finally neared Plimoth, exhausted. As he later recounted in his *Declaration of the Affairs of the English People that First Inhabited New England* (1662), as he was "running down a hill I see an English man coming in the path before me. Then I sat down on a tree & rising up to salute him said, 'Mr. Hamdin, I am glad to see you alive.' He said, 'I am glad & full of wonder to see you alive: let us sit down, I see you are weary.'" Pratt's narrative indicates that the two men knew each other; possibly, they had come over on the same ship. Whatever the case, thus warned, the Plimoth company were able to pre-empt the attack.

Some scholars have refuted the notion that Hampden could have been in America, since he was at the parliament that met in January 1621 and dissolved in 1622. However, the next parliament was not called until 1624, which allows for his being in Plimoth Colony during the winter of 1622-23. Relatively short trips to the Americas were possible even at this early date. For example, Robert Cushman, a supporter of Plimoth Colony, sailed to Plimoth aboard the *Fortune*, arriving there on Nov. 10, 1621, and departing for England on Dec. 13; all told, he was in transit five months, though this would have been significantly shorter if the ship had not been captured by French pirates on the way back. Plimoth Colony historian Robert C. Anderson, in his *Pilgrim Migration*, says that the possibility that Hampden took a quick journey to check out New England "should not be rejected so categorically." That Anderson's warning should be heeded is strongly suggested by Hampden's subsequent investment. Nearly a decade later, in 1632, the Earl of Warwick, president of the Council for New England, sold a patent he had been awarded to lands in the Connecticut River Valley. Among the purchasers, known as the Saybrook Company, was John Hampden.

Ezra and Sarah Jones Dickerman

The following communication comes from Robert Dickerman, of Hatfield, Massachusetts:

The destruction of the Ezra Dickerman house at 3217 Whitney Avenue by Quinnipiac College was a loss for Hamden. Although I'm a native of Illinois, several of my relatives lived in that house and I'm writing to share a few things about the lives they lived.

Ezra Dickerman, who raised his family at 3217 Whitney Avenue, was my great-great-grandfather. Born in 1799, he was the son of Amos and Chloe Dickerman (such nice names those two--Amos and Chloe--more than one pet has been named after them). In 1826 Ezra married Sarah Jones, with whom he had nine children. As was the case at the time, survival of children was unpredictable and only four of these, all boys (George, Edward, Henry and Watson), survived into a productive adulthood. Loss of a child is always tragic, but what is noteworthy is that most of Sarah's children did not die as infants, but rather left this world in young adulthood. These included three daughters, Elizabeth, Abbie and Sarah, and one son, Ezra Jr., who died from wounds sustained fighting under General Sherman in the Civil War. Another son died in infancy.

At the time, much was made of the deaths of the three daughters. Two died in their twenties and one, Sarah, at fifteen. A book entitled *The Sisters* was written by their pastor praising their devotion to the church and to the education of others. The causes of their deaths are unclear, but the prevailing opinion seemed to be that the rigors of education followed by Elizabeth and Abbie opening a seminary for young ladies had worn them out and led to their early demise. In support of this, their brother, George, wrote, "Not yet had been learned the costly lesson that the higher education of woman involves the assiduous care of her physical development." I'm not so sure about this. People died of a lot of things in the 19th century, but I don't think going to school and having a job was necessarily one of them. Based on their numerous accomplishments, I suspect Elizabeth and Abbie would have a strong opinion as to whether women were up to the rigors of schooling and work or not. They may well have accomplished great things if they survived.

Given this record of tragedy in the family one's thoughts turn to the parents and particularly the mother, Sarah, about whom history records little. Clearly she threw herself into raising her remaining four sons, Edward, Henry, George and Watson. Each received an excellent education and was launched on a promising career. In keeping with the times, they all went west - first to Illinois and later to Colorado. Henry, my great-grandfather, landed in Springfield, IL, and invited his brother Watson to follow him. In Springfield, Watson worked in a banking house run by J. Bunn for a short time before returning to New York where he formed his own brokerage firm, eventually becoming president of the New York Stock Exchange and a very wealthy man. The Bunn in Springfield went on to several other endeavors, including coffee makers, particularly the iconic Bunn-O-Matic, found in diners everywhere.

Henry, however, remained in Springfield, and that Sarah thought of her offspring, is shown by the fact that she made frequent visits; coming out to Illinois from Hamden to see her son, his wife and her four grandchildren. We know about these visits, lasting as long as month, due to their being documented in family letters and diaries, but also because, at some point, she went to visit a photographer.

And so, we have a photo of Sarah:



A small woman, she had buried five of her nine children when this picture was taken but still had the joy of visiting her grandkids. Although at the time she was fairly well-to-do and one of her sons was a very wealthy man, she does not appear unused to work. Those who have seen this picture often comment on the size of her hands. Possibly it's an effect of the photographer's lens--or possibly she'd be palming basketballs for the WNBA if she were alive today? Alternatively, it may be that her childhood spent on a farm resulted in her impressive manual development. Either way, what is known is that by the time this picture was taken she was living a life with some leisure. I'm sure she appreciated it.

From the back of the photo we see it was taken in Illinois during one of her visits from Hamden. The name of the photographer, Chris German, is significant because about half a block from his studio in Springfield was another office--the law office of A. Lincoln and W. Herndon. As a rising politician, Mr. Lincoln availed himself of Mr. German's services and in the years leading up to his election as the 16th president Mr. German took several well-known photos of him. This picture of Sarah, however, would have been taken some time later since a phone number is included and phone service was not initiated in Springfield until 1879.

As an aside, Mr. German himself had an earlier period of notoriety. In 1863 he reportedly learned that his wife, Cordelia, was not only already married to another man, but that during visits back to her home in Indiana she had returned to her former life of practicing prostitution. This was at an establishment run by her mother that was situated along the aptly named Wildcat Creek. Mr. German's response to this news was so extreme on the night that he learned of it that it led to Cordelia calling the police and having him arrested. Upon getting out he promptly initiated divorce proceedings against her. The whole story is unknown; people usually don't engage in activities such as prostitution unless they have no other options,

and so it seems there is almost certainly more to Cordelia's story, but her husband certainly made the most of it in the divorce proceedings and it was all reported in a most sensationalist manner in the local papers. Although it was some 20 years later that Sarah, wife of the highly moral Deacon Dickerman of Hamden, went to Mr. German's studio, it does seem likely that someone would have whispered his story into her ear as she set out. Perhaps that is what she's thinking of as she gazes serenely into the camera. Or, maybe she's thinking, "Hey, I'm standing where Lincoln stood!" Or maybe she's thinking of her grandkids; or that her feet hurt. It would be interesting to know.

Based on faded and silted old photographs, it can be easy to think of the lives of people in the 19th century as being quiet and circumscribed, but life for those living at the house at 3217 Whitney Avenue was anything but. Travel, founding schools for young women, being part of Sherman's March to the Sea, amassing great wealth, hanging out with people who knew Lincoln, adventures in the West: they had a lot going on. It may be that knowing a little more about their lives helps in better appreciating this world they have created for us.

I am very grateful for the invaluable assistance of my brother, Christopher Dickerman, in gathering and organizing much of this information.

For more articles on Hamden's history, and information on how to become a member, go to
hamdenhistoricalsociety.wordpress.com.

We are pleased to announced that the Jonathan Dickerman House will be open on weekend afternoons during June, July and August of 2022.

Newsletter
Hamden Historical Society
PO Box 5512
Hamden, CT 06518