



*A History of Deerfield,  
Massachusetts*

George Sheldon

1636—POCUMTUCK—1886

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A  
HISTORY  
OF  
DEERFIELD, *Mass.*  
MASSACHUSETTS:

THE TIMES WHEN AND THE PEOPLE BY WHOM IT WAS  
SETTLED, UNSETTLED AND RESETTLED:

WITH A SPECIAL STUDY OF THE

INDIAN WARS  
IN THE  
CONNECTICUT VALLEY.

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WITH GENEALOGIES.

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BY  
GEORGE SHELDON.  
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## CHAPTER VII.

### ATTEMPTED SETTLEMENT OF 1677.

The men of Pocumtuck who had escaped the storms of Philip's war, scattered in the towns below, anxiously awaited an opportunity of returning to cultivate their lands and gather their families under roof-trees of their own. A short time after the death of Philip, the hopeful Quintin Stockwell began to build a house on the Willard lot, his old home; but this was soon in ashes. In the spring of 1677, this persevering man, with a few other bold adventurers, again returned to Pocumtuck. Here they planted their fields in quiet and proceeded to build houses. They were cheerful, hopeful and helpful to each other. A house was put up for Sergt. John Plympton "18 feet long." Of his six children, one had died in peace; one slept at Bloody Brook, and four were settled in homes of their own. This small house was large enough for the sergeant and his "old wife Jane." Stockwell hoped his third attempt would provide a shelter for his wife and babe before the winter set in. John Root, thirty-one years old, had married the widow of Samuel Hinsdale, a victim at Bloody Brook. He thus became the protector of a helpless flock, for whom he was making ready a home on the Russell lot, the spot where they were born. Benoni Stebins, cheerily working to secure a dwelling place for his bride, the widow of James Bennett,—who was lost with Capt. Turner—was probably engaged on the Samuel Wells lot, where his house was burned and he killed Feb. 29th, 1704. Philip Mattoon, another young man, was about to pitch his tent here. July 31st, 1677, he made a bargain with John Pyncheon, by which he could secure a home for his bride, and Sept. 10th, he married Sarah, daughter of John Hawks of Hadley. The attempt at settlement failing, Mattoon came here later, and here died in 1696. This contract, the oldest met with, is given as illustrating in several points the condi-

tion of business affairs among the pioneers. It is found in John Pynchon's account book.

July 21, 1677. Let out to Philip Mattoon my 18 cow commons and 4 sheep commons at Pocumtuck, all the intervale land belonging to s<sup>d</sup> commons, (excepting the home lot which is already disposed of) according as it is laid out in several divisions, towards the upper end of Pocumtuck Meadows, for 11 years from the first of March next, to pay all rates, taxes and charges, make & leave good fences, to build on the land a good dwelling house, strong, substantial & well built, & compleatly finished, 30 ft long, 20 ft wide & 10 ft stud. Also a barn at least 48 ft long, 24 ft wide & 14 ft stud, well braced, all pts to be strong, substantial & workmanlike, & to compleate & finish the same before the end of the term, & then leave & deliver up all in good repair. He is also to pay thirty shillings a year for nine years, £3 the tenth, and £4 the last year. He is to have the use of two cows between the ages of four and seven years, & return two of like ages.

Other men may have been here, but the only other person known was Samuel, son of Philip Russell, a lad of eight years.

Two years and a day had passed since the blow fell at Bloody Brook, which "made 8 persons widows and 26 children fatherless in this Plantation." It was the soft evening twilight of Sept. 19th, 1677. The labors of the day were ended. The tired workmen were awkwardly preparing their suppers about their camp fire, chatting hopefully perhaps of the future, when this service should be more deftly performed by their helpmates, when they were rudely interrupted and amazed by the whistling of bullets, the crash of musketry, the wild war-whoop and furious rush of a band of savages who seemed springing from the ground all around them. Stockwell rushed down the hill into the swamp. He was seen, pursued and fired upon. He "slumped and fell down" in the mire. One of the pursuers thinking he was wounded came up to tomahawk him. Stockwell kept him at bay with an empty pistol. The Indian told him they "had destroyed all Hatfield and the woods were full of Indians," but assured him of safety if he would yield. Whereupon, Stockwell surrendered. Plympton, Stebbins, Root and Russell also fell into their hands. Root was soon killed, and after an ineffectual attempt to take the frightened horses of the settlers, the captives were led away into the woods on East Mountain. There, to their astonishment, and with mingled feelings of

joy and sadness, they found seventeen Hatfield people, likewise captives. Here Samuel Russell met several of his playmates and learned that his mother and little brother had been murdered at home, and the doleful tale of that morning's work of horror was told.

About eleven o'clock, this same party had surprised a few men who were raising a house at the north end of Hatfield, and shot three men from the frame; they then attacked and burned several houses outside the palisades and killed or captured most of their occupants, and hurried off in triumph.

The killed were Isaac Graves and his brother John; John Atchison, John Cooper, Elizabeth Russell and son Stephen; Hannah Coleman and her babe Bethiah; Sarah Kellogg and her baby boy; Mary Belding, and Elizabeth Wells, daughter of John. Her mother and another child were wounded, as were Sarah Dickinson and a child of John Coleman, but they all escaped. The captured were Obadiah Dickinson and child; Martha, wife of Benjamin Waite, with their children, Mary, six years old, Martha, four, and Sarah, two; Mary, wife of Samuel Foote, their children, Nathaniel, and Mary, three; Sarah Coleman, four, with another child of John Coleman; Hannah, wife of Stephen Jennings, with two of her children by Samuel Gillett, between three and six years old; Samuel Kellogg, eight, Abigail Allis, six, and Abigail Bartholomew of Deerfield, five.

The assailants were a party of twenty-six Indians from Canada, under Ashpelon; one was a Narraganset, the others Pocumtucks. With the captives they retreated hurriedly up the river. On reaching this vicinity, the smoke of their camp fires may have betrayed the settlers, and another prize was easily secured.

The captives were bound, and the march to far-off Canada began. They were the first party of whites ever taken on the sad journey, so often traveled in years to come. In scattered order they traversed the woods northward, the captors imitating the voices of beasts and birds that they should not lose one another, or be discovered by the English, if followed. They halted for the night near the mouth of Hearthstone brook, and at daybreak crossed Connecticut river at Sheldon's rocks. From this place ten men were sent back to the town, who returned with about ten horses

loaded with corn and other provisions. Here they marked on trees, as was their custom, the number of killed and captured. Continuing their march, they crossed the river again at Peskeompskut and camped for the night a few miles above. Here the captives were "staked down," and told the Indian law was to do this for nine successive nights. They were "spread out on their backs," the arms and legs stretched out and fastened to the ground with stakes, and a cord tied about the neck, so that they "could stir noways." Stockwell says, "the first night of staking down, being much tired, I slept as comfortable as ever." On the 21st, the party crossed the river to Northfield. Here they stopped awhile, but when their scouts reported English soldiers in pursuit, they went over the river again and scattered on the west side.

These soldiers were a party sent up from Hartford under Capt. Thomas Watts, Lieut. John Mawdsley and Ensign John Wyatt, with John Hawks and some others of the Hampshire men who joined. This party returned after going forty miles above Hadley, without finding the marauders.

Ashpelon's party went up the river perhaps as far as Putney, Vt., and crossed to the east side, where they were "quite out of all fear of the English but in great fear of the Mohawks." Here they built a long wigwam and had a great dance, preparatory to burning some of the captives. Ashpelon and others opposing, this ceremony was given up. From here, a small party went to Hadley; they were discovered near the mill, and captured or gave themselves up. They declared they came to make arrangements for the redemption of the captives, which is not unlikely. They were released after an agreement to meet the English on a certain plain in Hadley, on Sunday, Oct. 14th. To attend this meeting, Major Treat came up from Hartford with forty men "to lend his advice and grant assistance in defending the plantations, and the persons as shall be appointed to treat, in the best way and manner as they can. That all due endeavours be used for the redemption of the captives, by paying a sume of money or other goods; probably a quantity of liquors may not be amiss to mention in the tender." All this preparation was thrown away. Not an Indian appeared. The reasons will be seen.

When Ashpelon left Canada, a party of Nipmucks were in

company. Somewhere on the route they parted from him, apparently fixing on Nashua ponds as a rendezvous. The same day on which Ashpelon struck Hatfield, the Nipmucks reached the place where Wonalonset, with eight men and some fifty women lived. He was a Pennacook Sachem, who had been neutral through Philip's War. Partly by persuasion and partly by force, he was induced to remove to Canada, and the whole party moved towards Lancaster. Meanwhile, Ashpelon sent messengers to notify the Nipmucks to come to him on the Connecticut. With these went Benoni Stebbins. On the return of the party, Stebbins escaped about Oct. 2d, from a point near Templeton and reached Hadley on the 4th. As a consequence of this act, the English prisoners were all in danger of torture, and it was only through the kindness and policy of Ashpelon that this fate was averted. A short time before, the Indians taken and released at Hadley had returned; and the question of the meeting at Hadley, for which they had arranged, was under discussion. The captives urged it, Ashpelon was in favor of it, and it was proposed to send Wonalonset as agent. The Nipmuck Sachems were opposed to the policy. "They were willing to meet the English, indeed, but only to fall upon them and fight them and take them." The peace policy being overruled, Ashpelon advised the captives "not to speak a word more to further that matter, for mischief would come of it."

About October 20th the whole party moved towards Canada. Samuel Russell and little Mary Foote were killed by the way; the rest straggled into French or Indian towns about the first of January. Soon after, old Sergt. Plympton was burnt to death at the stake.

Since the opening of Philip's war, in Hampshire County alone two hundred and seven persons had been killed and forty wounded.

#### WAITE AND JENNINGS'S EXPEDITION.

When Capt. Watts returned from the pursuit northward with no tidings of the captives, it was generally thought that the Mohawks were the guilty ones, as a small party of that tribe were at Hatfield the day before; and Benjamin Waite, whose whole family was swept away, determined to seek them westward. He traversed the wilderness over the Hoo-

sac Mountain, but found no trace of the marauders. At Albany he became satisfied that the Mohawks were innocent. Returning with letters for Pynchon from Capt. Salisbury, commander at Albany, he reached Springfield Oct. 4th. Without a day's delay he pushed on to Boston, bearing a petition from Hatfield asking authority and aid for an expedition to Canada. The petition was granted, and on the 12th Waite was appointed agent. The very day Waite left the valley for Boston, Benoni Stebbins came in, and Pynchon at once dispatched a post to Capt. Salisbury, urging him to incite the Mohawks to pursue Ashpelon's party, "their old enemy and ours," with a promise of reward for the service. "Ben. Waite," he says, "is gone home before the Intelligence came to me. He talked of going to Canada before, and I suppose will rather be Forward to it now, than Backward." Pynchon judged the indomitable man rightly. He would never pause until he found his hapless family. With this object, neither distance, climate nor foe had terrors for him. Stephen Jennings, a like-minded man, also bereaved of wife and children, now joined Waite in this knightly quest.

With letters for the authorities in Albany and Canada, the men set out from Hatfield October 24th, and reached Albany the 30th. Here in an interview with Salisbury they were coldly received, and directed to wait upon him again. The impatient men, however, pushed on to Schenectady to procure an Indian guide. Here the old jealousy of New England appeared, and upon the most stupid pretext they were arrested and sent back to Albany, and finally to New York, for an examination before Gov. Brockholds. Through this vexatious hindrance, while every hour seemed a day, it was not until Dec. 10th, that these harassed men were able to resume their journey. Six weeks of precious time had been given to smooth the ruffled dignity of Commander Salisbury.

Now, with a Mohawk for a guide, the adventurers turned their faces toward a northern winter and an unknown wilderness. The Indian left them on reaching Lake George, and with no clue but a rough chart which he drew for them on a piece of birch bark, these men of tender hearts and iron will pushed forward on their chivalrous errand. At the lake they found an old bark canoe, which the Mohawk had patched up ;

this they dragged over the snow, or paddled through the icy waves of the lake, as necessity compelled. Were they cold or hungry, the thought that their wives and little ones might be freezing or starving urged them forward. With the birch bark chart in hand, they toiled day after day over the dreary wastes, until on New Year's day they reached the foot of Lake Champlain. Following the river Sorel, they passed the French outpost at Shambly, and soon after Jennings was rewarded by finding his wife—a meeting to be imagined only. It was not long before the surviving captives were found, all in the hands of the Indians, save a few who had been pawned to Frenchmen for liquor. In a few days the travelers set out for Quebec, one hundred miles down the St. Lawrence. They were kindly received by Governor Frontenac, and by his help the ransom of the whole party was effected by the payment of £200.

On the 22d of January, before Waite could have returned from Quebec, his wife gave birth to a child, who was named *Canada*. Fifty days later a girl was born to Jennings, and named *Captivity*.

Slowly the long Canada winter wore away, and on the 2d of May the whole party left Sorel and joyfully turned their faces homeward. An escort of French soldiers was sent by Frontenac as far as Albany, where they arrived on the 22d. From Albany, letters were posted to Hatfield. These letters, which are given below, gave the first news of the captives since the escape of Benoni Stebbins, and caused great rejoicing, mingled with sorrow for the fate of those who came not back.

ALBANY, May 22, 1678.

LOVING WIFE:—Hauing now opportunity to remember my kind loue to the and our child and the rest of our freinds, though wee met with greate afflictions and trouble since I see thee last, yet now here is opportunity of joy and thanksgiving to God, that wee are now pretty well, and in a hopeful way to see the faces of one another before we take our finall farewell of this present world, likewise God hath raised us freinds amongst our enemies, and there is but 3 of us dead of all those that were taken away—Sergt. Plympton, Samuel Russell, Samuel Foot's daughter. So I conclude, being in hast, and rest your most affectionate husband till death makes separation,  
 QUINTIN STOCKEWELL.

From ALBANY, May 23, 1678.

TO MY LOVING FRIENDS & KINDRED AT HATFIELD:—These few

lines are to let you understand that we are arrived at Albany now with the captives, and we now stand in need of assistance, with my charges is very greate and heavy ; and therefore any that hath any love to our condition, let it moove them to come and help us in this straight. There is 3 of y<sup>e</sup> captives that are murdered—old Goodman Plympton, Samuel Foot's daughter, Samuel Russell. All the rest are alive and well now with me at Albany, namely, Obadiah Dickenson and his child, Mary Foote and her child, Hannah Gennings and 3 children, Abigail Ellice, Abigail Bartholomew, Goodman Coleman's children, Samuel Kellogg, my wife and four children and Quintin Stockwell.\* I pray you hasten the matter, for it requireth greate hast. Stay not for y<sup>e</sup> Sabbath, nor shoeing of horses. We shall endeavour to meete you at Canterhook, it may be at Houseatonock. We must come very softly because of our wives and children. I pray you, hasten them, stay not night nor day, for y<sup>e</sup> matter requireth great hast. Bring provisions with you for us.

Your loving kinsman,

BENJAMIN WAITE.

At Albany, written from myne owne hand. As I have bin affected to yours, all that were fatherless, be affected to me now, and hasten y<sup>e</sup> matter and stay not, and ease me of my charges. You shall not need to be afraid of any enemies.

These letters, warm from the heart, reached the heart of the whole colony. They were copied by John Partridge, who, in company with John Plympton, son of the tortured captive, carried the copies to Medfield. Rev. Mr. Wilson at once sent them to the Governor at Boston with the following letter:—

Worshipful S<sup>r</sup>

humbly presenting my humblest Servic to yo<sup>r</sup> wor<sup>sh</sup> keeping with these letters Copy<sup>d</sup> out and newly brought fr<sup>m</sup> Hadly by one John Partridge and not understanding of any Couriers to the Bay besydes: I have written out of these two Copys word for word as I take it & make bold to send it to your Worship :

y<sup>t</sup> so you might be enformed of the Mercy of God in y<sup>e</sup> return of these Captives so far as y<sup>e</sup> two letters set Down. John Partridge and John Plimpton come in this night & none with y<sup>m</sup> but a young mayde so y<sup>t</sup> I suppose yo<sup>r</sup> Worsh<sup>sh</sup> will have y<sup>e</sup> very first view of y<sup>e</sup> News in Boston being very crasy am unfit to enlarge & y<sup>t</sup> I might not trouble your Worsh<sup>sh</sup> further

With my humble Servicecs presented to you<sup>r</sup> most virtuous Lady humbly reste

Your Worsh<sup>sh</sup> most humble  
Servant                      John Wilson

Medfield, May 29-78

A fast had been appointed for June 6th. The Governor received the letters May 29th, and the next day sent copies

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\* There is 2 or 3 frenchmen Embassadors coming to go to Boston. This sentence was erased. These men may have been stopped by Pynchon in the valley.

of Waite's letter to all the churches, to be read from the pulpit on that occasion, with a recommendation that a contribution for the benefit of the captives be taken up in every congregation. "And the ministers are desired to stir up the people thereunto. For quickening this work we do hereby remit a copy of Benjamin Waite's letter to be read publickly." This touching appeal of Waite was generously responded to,\* and many an offering dropped on the altar of charity that day was sanctified by tears. Who shall say that the gratitude engendered in the hearts of Benjamin and Martha Waite by the outpouring of that day was not nursed in the hearts of their descendants, until it bore fruit in that act of *Oliver Smith*, from whence flows the broad stream of charity which to-day blesses, and shall forever bless, the widow and fatherless in this valley!

"They remained in Albany five days," says Judd, "and on Monday, May 27th, walked twenty-two miles to Kinderhook, where they met men and horses from Hatfield." With the tired women, and, besides the two babes, twelve children under eight, the statement that they walked to Kinderhook, seems improbable. Did not Waite procure horses at Albany? and was not this expense, "charges" from which he sought "relief" by meeting horses from Hatfield? Judd continues, "They rode through the woods to Westfield, and soon all reached Hatfield in safety. The day of their arrival was one of the most joyful days that Hatfield ever knew."

The attempt to resettle the town in 1677 was not a rash, unconsidered affair, but fully in accord with public opinion and State policy. The catastrophe here did not change that policy, but it incited to greater caution.

October 22d, 1677, the General Court ordered the towns to "endeavour the new moddelling the scittuation of their houses, so as to be more compact, and liue nearer together for their better defense;" and a committee was appointed for Hampshire:—

"To ord<sup>r</sup> and contrive the same \* \* \* and as a further provisions for the security of those townes, it is ordered, that a garrison be staid at Deeresfield, and for effecting the same, it is ordered that the inhabitants of that place doe repayre thither this winter, (if the com-

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\* In the church at Dorchester "£3 5s 6d in money" was contributed "after ye evening exersiz."

itee doe judge it safe) and provide for the settling thereof in the spring, which shallbe in a compact way, as ordered by the comittee, and this winter, stuff for fortification to be provided, ready to be sett up there in the spring, viz, in March or Aprill ; at which time twenty soudjers shall be sent up by the Gouner & council to that place as they shall see cause, whose worke & care shallbe, to preserue & secure that place, & those adjoining there from the Indyans.

At the same date, six soldiers were ordered to Hatfield, to be under Lieut. Allis, and employed in the winter time in getting out timber for the fortifications at Hatfield and Deerefield. Maj. Pynchon was directed to treat with Connecticut about joining "in keeping the garrison at Dearefield." The six soldiers were sent to Hatfield, but no evidence is found that anything was done *here* during the winter of 1677-8. The "Comittee" probably did "not judge it safe."