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Biography of Capt. John AYRES

(d. 1675, Brookfield, MA)

Quaboag Plantation - Alias Brookfield: A Seventeenth Century Massachusetts Town by Louis E. Roy, M. D., West Brookfield, MA; Worcester, MA: Heffernan Press, Inc., 1965.

A xeroxed portion of this book is in the possession of Gloria (ODOM) TROMMLER. It contains an excellent biography of Captain John Ayres in Chapter VII (pages 222-230) and other information and I have transcribed it as found; the NUMBERS in parenthesis are FOOTNOTES at the END - as follows:

In late October 1963, there was raised on Foster Hill in West Brookfield, a memorial to Sergeant John Ayres. This was erected by Colonel Fairfax Ayres of Shaftsbury, Vermont, an eighth generation direct descendant of John Ayres, in permanent remembrance of the head of that family which had such a vital influence on the early course of events at the Quaboag settlement. John, though not the earliest arrival at Quaboag Plantation, was certainly one of the most influential persons in its brief history. The memorial reads as follows: "John Ayres, killed by the Indians, 2nd-1675-Aug. By grant of the Great & General Court, 1660 a founder of Quaboag Plantation an isolated frontier outpost, now Brookfield. First Sergt. Ayres, Pritchard and Coy were massacred 'on an affayre to meet with Indians who declare themselves to be enemyes and reduce them.' 'Set upon, scalped and none left to bury them.' 'Ayres Tavern was the fortified hous wherein tounefolk defended themselves as flaming roof and walls, from brimstone shot with arrows, balls of wildfire, carts aflame heaped with flax. Water to slake thirst was spent to quench fires.'"

The early history of the Ayres family appears to be lost in confusion over names. Certainly, the antecessors of this family prior to the arrival of John at Ipswich, cannot be easily traced. The prime biographer of the family, William Henry Whitmore, in his excellent genealogy states flatly: 'I know nothing of his parentage' (1). In an article which he wrote for the New England Historical and Genealogical Register in 1863 he says thus: 'Having spent some time in tracing the early generations of two distinct families of Ayres and Ayers I desire to preserve the result. Savage, (renowned biographer of early New Englanders), in his account, makes a mistake which escaped my notice till my attention was called to it by Mr. Melvin Lord. Captain John Ayres of Ipswich and Brookfield was not the son of John Ayres of Haverhill. I have carefully examined the deeds of Salem, and have careful copies of the town records of Ipswich and Haverhill, and these show that the mistake had been made by confounding two persons of the same name. It has been suggested that he was the John Eyre, grocer of Norwich, England, age 40 in 1637, who went to Holland, but this seems highly improbable (2).' And so we are left without any definite leads as to the place of origin of the family prior to the immigration to New England.

The first concrete fact we were able to associate with the family, is the appearance of the name of John Ayres in the early records of Ipswich. This appears in the year 1643, which indicates the approximate date of coming to Ipswich (3), but not necessarily exactly, since grants were frequently recorded sometime after they had been made. He was also listed as an inhabitant of Ipswich in 1648 (4), and married Susanna, daughter of Mark Symonds of who's (Mark Symonds) estate he was appointed administrator (5). In such capacity, on November 24, 1659, he sold a house and a three acre lot to

another son-in-law of the deceased, Edward Chapman (Ipswich Deed 3:351) (6). He was allowed the privilege of commonage in February 1667, and admitted a commoner at Ipswich in March of the same year (7).

Captain John, as he was known at Ipswich, came to Quaboag Plantation before May 1667. The time of his removal can be estimated fairly accurately from known facts. He was named one of a prudential committee for the new plantation in the Regrant of 1667. At the time of his removal, he has his full family, consisting of seven sons and one daughter, all of whom came with him to Quaboag. They were: John Jr., about 18; Samuel, about 17; Thomas, 15; Joseph, 12; Susanna, about 11; Edward, 9; Mark, 6; and, Nathaniel, under 3 years of age.

This father and head of family certainly had need for provisions to maintain his large dependency, and it is not long after his arrival that he begins what is to be an extensive trade with John Pynchon of Springfield. The first entries in the Account Book on July 14, 1668 are for bacon, corn, salt, and white meal - all household necessities (8). John Ayres was owner of much land within the Plantation. The amount which he paid John Pynchon for his original grant was 5 Li 12s 6p, or four and a half times the value of a single house lot with its usual allowance of meadow and planting ground (9). In addition to this, he leased a large meadow (Matchuk-19 acres) from John Pynchon from June 28, 1671, until the time of his death. Record of this appears in his account on: June 28, 1671; November 28, 1672; October 23, 1673; and, August 18, 1674 (10). This large acquisition and usage of land indicates that he had grown sons, that he was relatively wealthy, and that he was capable of maintaining such an amount of this most precious commodity. He can certainly be classified as a substantial husbandman.

Probably from the time of construction of his home and establishment of himself at Quaboag, he provided accommodations for travelers. Although his first actual license for maintaining a tavern was not granted until the Fall of 1671, the following entry leads us to believe that he offered food and shelter prior to that time. On June 28, 1671, the following: 'By my expense at his house last summer and once this Spring 00 12 00' (11). That Ayres was a respected planter is confirmed by the following found in the Record of Hampshire County Court for September 26, 1671: 'Goodman Ayres of Quabaug licensed to sell wine, etc.' (12). This permit was renewed on September 24, 1672: 'Goodman Ely of Springfield hath his license continued for the year ensuing to keep ordinary and to sell wines and strong liquors, providing he keep good rule in his house. Also Goodman Ayres of Quaboag hath his license continued on the same terms' (13). And for the last time on September 29, 1674: 'John Aires of Brookfield hath his license renewed for the year ensuing' (14). As we know, this tavern was still in operation at the time of the Indian assault on August 2, 1675, and being the strongest building at the Plantation, was converted into a fortified house to provide protection during the siege which followed.

In addition to his maintaining a large farm and keeping the tavern, John Ayres found it advantageous to devote much of his time to the mill of John Pynchon. He was associated with this most essential enterprise from the very beginning of the construction of the mill. The first link with the project comes in the following account of the Plantation with John Pynchon: 'The Towne Dr. Aug. 1669 2 li steel G Aires had for Web more 4 li Steel G. Aires had Nov. 8, 1669' (15). Also, on November 8, 1669, Goodman Ayres received delivery of nails and a 'spindle in Rine' for the mill (16). On June 28, 1671, he was paid 2 Li 1s 8p for his part in building the mill house, and 12 Li 14s 7p for other matters relating to the mill, by John Pynchon (17). The large amount of money involved certainly indicates that Ayres either sold a considerable piece of property or rendered valuable services to Mr. Pynchon in connection with the mill. In November 28, 1672, is recorded the beginning of a business arrangement with John Pynchon which was to last for the remainder of his (Ayres) life: 'Agreed with G. Aires, to keep my mill at Quabaug and tend it, to grind corn brought there, for one year, he to take the tole allowed, viz., one half peck out of a bushel, on all the corn that shall be ground by one and all; and for his tending the mill, he is to have one third of the tole, I am to have the rest for my part paid. He is to grind all the corn at the mill except Gdm. Pritchard's corn. Gdm. Pritchard having liberty to grind his own corn only' (18). On December 18, 1673, this agreement was renewed 'for the year coming or

longer on the same terms as formerly' (19). The final determination of this contract is recorded as follows (Date probably Aug. 28, 1675): 'Goodman Aires owes me more for corn of mine, which he had at the mill, as he told me being, in June 1675, when I left my expenses at his house on acot, he spoke of eight or ten bushels to allow me for, and what he had about 14 bushels 1/2 as he gave me an acot on April 28, 1675. That he did not proportion that wheat because he said it would be more, he having disposed of it, and would give me an acot of altogether; and malt of mine, he took it all, so that I acot he owes me near about 4 li, whereof I have received as per contra about 2 li so rests due to me about 2 li' (20). The account was settled by discount of 1 Li 7s 11p on August 28, 1675. This last was of course after the violent death of John Ayres at the hands of the Indians.

John Ayres, farmer, taverner and miller, still had time and energy left to devote to civil affairs of the infant plantation. As mentioned previously, he was one of those appointed by the General Court in 1667 to the committee to oversee the affairs of Quaboag Plantation - a position of considerable responsibility. He continued in that capacity until the incorporation in 1673. His name appears on the ill-fated petition of October 9, 1670, requesting a grant of additional lands at Quaboag to provide an inducement for increased settlement. The Petition for Incorporation contains the names of John Sr., John Jr., and Samuel Ayres, indicating the importance of the family in the affairs of the community. John Sr. served as Constable for a period, as revealed by the following in the Magistrate Book on November 2, 1670: 'James Hovey and Priscilla Warner of Quaboag joined in marriage. Constable John Aires attesting their legal publication' (21). In a controversial court case between John Younglove and the inhabitants of Quaboag Plantation on June 19, 1672, John Ayres and William Pritchard represented the interests of the people in a losing battle with their unstable minister. However, in an other encounter with Mr. Younglove on March 31, 1674, he was more successful: 'John Ayres, Sr., of Brookfield being complained of to this Court for that he refuses to pay certain arrearages of which he has been assessed toward Mr. Younglove his maintenance. Also, he brings the fact to make his defense sayeth: It was for that the arrearages for which he is now assessed for keeping the ordinary formerly: the Court doth acot that such arrearages ought to be paid by the people therein, in general some other way, and it is belaid on him for keeping the ordinary past: And as to the question, the Court they should like that Mr. Younglove may have his due. The Court decrees that the law doth - determine it. Therefore do accordingly order that which is to be yet due him his acot, for to the selectman there to assess the inhabitants there for it, in the way which they formerly paid by hand, levy the same by the Constable according to law' (22).

On the same day, March 31, 1674, John Ayres along with Thomas Parsons were referred to by the Court as available consultants for the committee appointed to construct a bridge over Coy's Brook, as a connecting link of the Hadley Path, then under construction (23). Here again we find our subject busy in the affairs of the community.

The personal affairs of the family saw changes in the years 1672 and 1673. On August 28, 1672, John Ayres Jr., married Abigail Hovey, as recorded in the Magistrate Book (24). Soon after this, in November 1672, John Sr., sold all his lands and rights in Ipswich (25). On November 28, 1672, he purchased a lot at Quaboag for his son Samuel for a few shillings more than the customary price for a single house lot (26). The entry specifies that the lot contained 30 acres. On December 18, 1673, John Sr., and John Jr., 'Tooke the Oath of Fidelity to This Government' (27).

On June 18, 1675, an action in the office of Magistrate Pynchon substantiates the strength of character of the subject of this biography. This man had no intention of sitting back and allowing the Selectmen of Brookfield to force upon him what he considered to be an unjust restraint. He used a legal form of appeal for review by higher authority of the actions of town officials. Here is the record in the Magistrate Book: 'June 18th, 1675. John Aires Sen. of Brookfield plaintiff (according to Replevy) against William Pritchard & Samuel Kent, Selectmen of Brookfield: for unlawfully distreining some pewter dishes of his, which the Constable did by occasion of their order: William Pritchard and Samuel Kent appearing & putting it upon, profess that they gave order for the distress, and plainly not owning

it, and John Aires not proving it: I allowed their charges vis., for 3 days each, which is six shillings apiece, in all 12s for Jo Aires to pay to William Pritchard and Samuel Kent, and likewise six shillings for Corporal Coy's appearance as a witness by warrant:' (28) In addition to his other activities, Sergeant Ayres was commander of the small detachment of militia. Although he held the rank of captain during his residence at Ipswich, he had had to accept the lower rank at Quaboag because of the small size of the military contingent. He was assisted in his duties by Second Sergeant William Prichard and Corporal Richard Coy. The Indian ambush and subsequent siege make up a separate section of our history and so will not be dealt with here in detail. John Ayres, as commander of the local detachment of militia, and his subordinate non-commissioned officers Sgt. Prichard and Corp. Coy, were the ones to accompany Captain Wheeler and Captain Hutchinson in the mission of peace to the Indians on that fateful August 2, 1675. All three of these valiant men were to die with others of the military troops sent from Marlboro to treat with the Indians.

Even the death of John was not to end the contribution of this man to the welfare of the community, since it was to be his house which was to provide a haven of relative safety and to be occupied and defended by the surviving inhabitants and soldiers through those three gruesome days in August 1675. After the Indian siege of Brookfield had been relieved by the arrival of Major Willard and his troop, the inhabitants left for scattered areas, looking for security and peace. Suzannah Ayres and her children returned to the familiar surroundings of Ipswich where still remained some of her kinship. She presented to the Court at Salem an inventory of the estate of her deceased husband amounting to 195 Li 13s and 6p. In 1678, she is found as the owner of a house in Ipswich (29). Among those of the family listed as residents of Ipswich in 1678, in addition to Suzannah, we find John Jr., Joseph, Samuel Sr., Samuel Jr., and Thomas Ayres (30). In 1682, a former resident of Massachusetts Bay Colony, named Samuel Hall, left a bequest of 100 Li to be distributed among the victims of the great fire in Boston and of the Indian wars in the Colony. Suzannah received 33s of this, but died soon after on February 2, 1682-3 (31, 32).

In 1703, Samuel, John and Thomas were appointed executors of the estate of John Sr. On January 14, 1716, as recorded in Worcester in 1741, the land formerly possessed at Brookfield by John Ayres Sr., was conveyed to Joseph Ayres of Ipswich by Thomas, Mark, Edward, and Nathaniel, sons of Sgt. John; and by Samuel, son of Samuel and grandson of Sgt. John; and by Robert Day, son of Suzannah (Ayres) (Day) Waite and grandson of Sgt. John.

There apparently was discord, for on October 28, 1717, appeared the following petition to the General Court, which summarizes the situation and will be quoted in toto: The petition is dated June 17, 1717, but was read in the House of Representatives on October 26, 1717: 'A petition of Thomas Ayres, Joseph Ayres, Mark Ayres, Nathaniel Ayres and Edward Ayres sons and heirs of John Ayres heretofore of Quaboag, alias Brookfield, deceased in testate, showing that in or about the year 1660, the petition of father with others bought and purchased of the Indian natives tract of land of about eight miles square then known and called by the name of Quaboag, after which, viz in the year 1673, the General Court erected the said land into a township by the name of Brookfield, then in the year 1675 a war broke out with the Indians, who killed the petitioners' father and several other inhabitants, and the rest being drawn off by order of the government, the whole town was left desolate, and all the houses burned down by the enemy, after which, about 1690, the said town of Brookfield was in a likely way to be settled. And in the year 1703, the petitioners having obtained an administration on their father's estate lying in Brookfield aforesaid, petitioned the General Court that a committee might be appointed by make inquiry and cause a record to be made of the lots, rights, and proprietries of land within the said plantation belonging to the ancient settlers thereof, that so the petitioners might have and enjoy what belongs to them in the right of their father, which prayer of the petitioners was accordingly granted, and Samuel Partridge Esq., and others appointed a committee were ordered to make inquiry and cause a record to be made of the said lands, rights, and proprietries, but the said committee neglecting in that service, then petitioners renewed their petition to the General Court, who appointed a hearing thereon; however the petitioners withdrew their petition at the request of the said committee, and upon their

promise that they would forthwith proceed to settle the petitioners in their rights which accordingly they did to the satisfaction of the petitioners, who were at the expense of 150 Li at least in obtaining the said settlement, but after all the committee did at last declare all their proceedings in the premises to be null and void under no other pretense, but that the said lands were not improved by the petitioners, and the very lots that the petitioners father died possessed of, and particularly his home lot which he defended against the Indians at the loss of his life, are granted by the said committee to other persons very unjustly and contrary to the order of the General Assembly, by all which the petitioners are kept out of the possession of father's estate. Upon the whole the petitioners pray the honorable Court will confer upon them the lands which the said committee have laid out to them containing by estimation no more than 1,500-1,600 acres, although they have heard their father and many others say that he had 2,000 acres of land in Brookfield. Which lands so laid out by the said committee they shall rest satisfied and contended, unless the Court shall please to make them some further consideration: Read in the House of Representatives October 26, 1717 and ordered that the Committee of Brookfield be served with a copy of this and the petitioners former petition, and that they appear before this Court on the second Thursday of the next May session, to show reason why they declared the petitioners land to be forfeited. Sent up for concurrence. Read and concurred. Consented to: Samuel Shute' (33).

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