



JOHN HART, SIGNER OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.\*

THE ANCESTRY OF THE HON. JOHN HART, OF HOPEWELL, N. J., SIGNER OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE.

*(Being original researches made for a descendant.)*

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*Manager of the Bureau of American Ancestry.*

IN pursuing this very interesting inquiry as to the direct ancestry of the Hon. John Hart, the Signer, our attention was first called to a book recording the descendants of Deacon Stephen Hart, of Farmington, Conn. It is therein stated that he, with his supposed brother, Edmund Hart, arrived at Massachusetts Bay about 1632, and located at Cambridge and Dorchester. Nothing further is said of the brother's descendants, who doubtless settled in New England or thereabouts, possibly in Weymouth, Mass. Nor have we been able to conclusively prove that any of them was the ancestor of our line, though indications do certainly point in that

\* NOTE.—This picture of John Hart is a reproduction of the one in the well-known collection of Dr. Thomas A. Emmet of New York city. While for years such a picture was not supposed to exist, it is sufficient to say that this authority is good proof of its authenticity. "Mr. Charles Pascal of Philadelphia, who, during his life, was probably the best informed on the John Hart line, accepted his picture as authentic, and was quite positive on the subject, on account of inherited similarity of likeness existing among living descendants." "The picture corresponds generally with pictures found in various branches of the family in several States, said pictures having been cherished for many years and accepted without question as correct likenesses of John Hart."

direction, and might quickly be determined but for the lack of records. We feel quite sure that but for the misfortunes befalling the early records of the historic and ancient town of Flushing, L. I., recklessly destroyed by fire in the house of John Vanderbilt, October, 1789, due to his slaves, some solution to this problem would have been offered us. Depending, as we must, upon the Colonial Records of New York State and such of the Friends' records as may be found, for information, we learn but little of Flushing and its people, though the fact that an Edward Hart is mentioned in the former, as a resident therein, causes us to feel that that really is the place from which our investigations should begin. The first we hear of him is January 17, 1648, when it appears that Edward Hart, John Townsend, Thomas Styles, John Lawrence, and John Hicks were summoned to appear before Governor Stuyvesant and Council, on January 23, as the principal persons who resisted the Dutch mode of choosing a sheriff—"pretending it is against the adopted course of the fatherland, and who refuse to contribute their share of the maintenance of the Christian pious Reformed minister." In 1657, a certain Henry Townsend being condemned for calling a Friends' meeting, a letter of remonstrance was drawn up by the people of Flushing and Jamaica, and signed with others by Edward Hart, Town Clerk. It is not certain that Edward Hart, who doubtless prepared this interesting paper, was one of that sect, since his arguments, based upon the large and liberal ground of Christian liberty fortified by Scripture, do not prove any other interest than that of a large-hearted Christian citizen, who, as a public servant, would plead the liberty rightly belonging to each and all. The many names attached testify to the intense feeling of the community regarding it, and perhaps explain why, as a protest, the New York government should arrest and imprison the rebellious official, and release him only when the people exhibited signs of real penitence. Edward Hart secured his freedom through the activity of his neighbors, who pleaded that his large family was suffering in consequence of his confinement.

To us the vital question at the moment is as to the members of his family, and it is here we most deeply regret the lack of those town records. Nor can we say what relation the other Edward Hart, who also signs this petition, might have been to the Town Clerk. Indications would have us think a son, but fail even then to connect him directly with this the fully proved line, though but the bounds of a township separated them.

Our first John Hart lived in Newtown, L. I., which borders on Flushing. Where he came from is not determined. He was an original settler and a large land-owner in a region called Maspeth Kills—a territory reaching down to a creek that bounded the town on one side, and containing, with much good meadow, salt marshes, an island, and low land. His will, recorded in the New York Probate Office (Vol. I., p. 153), and proved in 1671, names the children, with the exception of the eldest son (John), who, having already received his portion, is given one shilling. To the others—Samuel, William of Menticock (Matinick, near Oyster Bay, L. I., an old Friends' settlement), Sarah, and Susan—was given the farm.

Much information is gleaned of the Newtown Harts from the old town records and deeds at Jamaica, and from an old book found with the town clerk at Newtown. Our knowledge of John Hart (1st) begins March 11, 1668, as stated in the *Annals of Newtown*, when he and James Way



secured the meadow land at Maspeth Kills, which had been in dispute between Bushwick and Newtown.

Of his son John, July 1, 1678: "Land laid out for John Hart on his father's right, ten acres or thereabouts, on the east side of Joseph Burroughs' land."

Of his son William, August, 1679: William Hart, of Mentincock, L. I., in the North Riding of Yorksheer in America, sells to "My brother John Hart of Newtown, in the West Riding of Yorksheer on L. I. land formerly my father's, John Hart, dec." (Newtown Records, Vol. I., p. 290.)

Of his son Samuel, October 1, 1679, John Hart sells to Thomas Case, of Maspeth Kills, land with building which belonged to "My father John Hart deceased; and made over by bill of sale to Case by my brother Samuel Harte, who was administrator to my father, by my brother William or my sister or other children of ye said John Hart, my father, dec."

A little more light is thrown upon the possessions and family of the Harts, as we note that in ———, 1684, John Hart and Joseph Sachett, of Newtown, sell part of an island formerly called Smith's Island, lying in bounds of Newtown, and bounded by the creek which parts Newtown and Bushwick; it being Hart's estate of inheritance. Also, that on January 5, 1690, John Hart and Mary his wife, of Newtown, carpenter, sell land at Ouldfeld's Neck (near Oyster Bay). In 1703 we find that John Hart sells a certain tract or neck of land at south of Oyster Bay, in Queens County, called Massipdaque Neck, or more commonly known by the name of Fort Neck. It was formerly property of Captain John Townsend, 1696. It is very evident that the above transactions are those of John Hart (2d), who by trade was a carpenter, and whose wife was Mary. We also find that on June 24, 1701, land was laid out for John Hart, of Newtown, in two lots, one of thirty-nine acres and another of thirteen acres. (Town Book, p. 128.)

And at another time sixteen acres and a half were laid out to John Heart, of Newtown, near Philip Ketcham's land (p. 129). All of these pieces were recorded in May, 1705, at the request of John Heart, Jr. (son to ye above-named John Heart). Evidently John Hart (3d) now appears, to confuse us in our search; but a distinction has been well made for us, as we note on p. 33, Town Book, that on April 27, 1704, John Hart, yeoman, of Newtown, sells thirty-nine acres and a half in Long Swamp to Philip Ketcham, it being his estate of inheritance. And again, May 31, 1704, John Hart, of Newtown, yeoman, sells to William West one-half acre of land, with house, barn, and barrack, it being his estate of inheritance.

If, as we have rightly assumed, this John Hart, the yeoman, was the son of John Hart, the carpenter, the year 1704 was a noteworthy one in the family, with its numerous recorded transactions, among them being what appeared to be the sale of the old homestead estate. Nor is it necessary to assume that John the carpenter was at this time deceased. We can very well understand that those were busy years with one whose trade was much in demand. Carefully must he have planned the care of his household, and the difficult task of successful removal to a new country. When his son John had become of sufficient age to attend to the duties of the farm at Newtown, and care for the younger children, John the carpenter

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could well be spared to prepare that new and more attractive home in the far-off Jersey land. What we have seen recorded here upon the Newtown records is the final act, as it were, since after this date the Harts disappear. Ere, however, we follow them to Jersey, let us record what we find at Newtown bearing date 1701.

It is a request to the inhabitants of Newtown to hang gates to the Kills, signed, with many others, by Raulph Heart, John Coe, John Heart, Tunis Titus, Robert Field, Nathaniel Field, John Hunt, Josiah Furman, Samuel Moore, Joseph Sachett, Joseph Sackett, Jr. Since we shall have occasion to refer to this name of Raulph or Ralph Hart at Hopewell, as well as to John, and by it have been assisted in identifying the line, it is important to note it here. It is the only mention of Ralph to be found on all the Newtown records. The other names are quite familiar in the Hopewell search.

At just what time the inhabitants of Newtown and surrounding parts were made acquainted with the fertile lands of West Jersey, it is difficult to determine. That they had for years been much irritated by the severity of the Dutch in New York is readily understood and appreciated, and in consequence an opportunity for larger and more favorable religious liberties was naturally sought for. The people here, coming in from the eastward, had located at a time when, under the jurisdiction of Connecticut, the New England ideas accorded them more sympathy and encouragement in their religious views. But, later, Newtown, Flushing, and Jamaica became border lines much in dispute between the Dutch and English control, till those poor Englishmen who dared to locate so very near the reach of Dutch influence were sure to feel what to them was the hand of oppression. While it was the Dutch Reformed Church that prevailed about New York, the inhabitants of Newtown were largely Presbyterian, amidst some hardship bravely persisting in the organization of a parish that still stands as a monument to their zeal. At that time there were lines of communication between New York and Philadelphia and the several localities in Jersey. Not only the constant movements of missionaries and travelling preachers, but the fresh arrival of new settlers from England, kept constantly in their minds the undeveloped territory westward. Under such circumstances, therefore, our ancestors were restive, and in view of the greater inducements offered in those rich and fertile fields, hardly to be compared with their present choice, a change was quickly accomplished.

The Rev. Dr. Hale, some years ago pastor at Hopewell, N. J., in a letter written and published in the *History of the Presbyterian Church of Jamaica*, says: "Hopewell was settled about the year 1700, principally by emigrants from Long Island. These emigrants were founders of the First Presbyterian Church of Hopewell, which formed part of the old congregation of Maidenhead (Lawrence) and Hopewell." In this connection we would also quote from the *History of the Presbyterian Church of Newtown, L. I.*, by Rev. J. P. Knox. Rev. Samuel Pinney was pastor between the years 1708 and 1744. "During his ministry, in 1715, he, with his church, was received into the Presbytery of Philadelphia" (the first presbytery organized in this country, and at the time in its infancy). "Before, this was an immature Presbyterian Church, but now entered the ranks of that denomination."

All this simply indicates how close was the association of Newtown with



the territory toward Philadelphia, and how readily access was found to so desirable a settlement. And ere we turn to the records of Hopewell let us note that Ralph Hunt of Jamaica, 1688, Theophilus Phillips of Newtown, 1673, and Samuel Hunt, named in the following deed of church property at Hopewell, were all, about the year 1692, inhabitants of Nottingham township, that bordered Hopewell and Lawrence on the south. How instrumental these men may have been in the settlement of the new township must be left to conjecture. The earliest records of the Hopewell country appear in connection with the deeding of the church property at Lawrenceville (Maidenhead) in 1698, as noted on p. 844, *History of Burlington and Mercer Counties*. It must have been some time before this that the first settlers located there, and at the earliest opportunity provided themselves with religious privileges.

The first record of the State bearing upon this subject is found in Liber A. A. of Deeds, office of Secretary of State at Trenton, dated August 26, 1703, wherein it states that the grant of Hopewell township was confirmed at the house of Ralph Hunt, in Maidenhead township. To this is signed some thirty or more names, "that heard read the agreement between Dr. Daniel Cox, Esq., and Thomas Revell, in behalf of the purchasers of the land within Maidenhead and Hopewell and agree." Most of the names found on the above-mentioned deed of church property reappear here, with others in addition, among them being the name of John Hart. Now, without going into detail, it may be said that, except it be accepted as a fact that the large majority of these settlers came from Newtown and neighboring townships, it is a remarkable fact how well these names agree with names of those localities. After a careful investigation we have been forced to the conclusion, therefore, that the John Hart herein mentioned was the John Hart of Newtown who has appeared before, with Mary, his wife, as a carpenter, and whose services must have been much in demand in this new and growing territory, wherein so many of his friends and neighbors were happily interested. The more is this view confirmed as we find in the old Town Book of Maidenhead that at a town-meeting of Maidenhead, called January, 1712, for the "promoting of a county in the upper part of the province above Assinpink, and to subscribe," John Hart, Jr., subscribed fifteen shillings; while in Liber B. B. of Deeds, p. 94, it reads that on "February 17, 1710 (though not signed till 1713), at Burlington, John Hart of Hopewell, County of Burlington, yeoman, being in the great meadow belonging to Maidenhead, sells to G. Cooke for £200, one hundred and seventy acres of land in Maidenhead, which was John Hart's absolute estate of inheritance." Showing that John Hart the yeoman inherited property there even as early as 1713, and that even as late as 1712 he had signed himself as John Hart, Jr.

Under the circumstances of those early and crude beginnings, in a new country, afar from their county seat, with no Trenton (but six miles away) in existence, and a form of government hardly established, it is not to be expected that the records of the period should be in any sense complete, or the proofs we so much need readily found. To this fact we must attribute the loss of the will of John Hart the carpenter, and all knowledge of an estate that must have been of considerable value. Our conviction is that Ralph Hunt and Theophilus Phillips had much to do with the settlement of the Hopewell region; that John Hart the carpenter went there some time before his family, to prepare the way, leaving his

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eldest son, John, with Ralph, both old enough now to care for the farm at Newtown. At the time of removal, probably about 1704 and '5, John, the young yeoman, aided much in the settlement of affairs there and the removal of the family to the new settlement, wherein his ability as a farmer was well displayed, and where the other children still in need of parental oversight grew to manhood.

At just what date John the carpenter died we cannot say. Our data indicates the year 1712-13. There might have been special meaning and application in the naming of Edward Hart's child "John" at the baptism in Maidenhead, December 21, 1713. In the absence of other proof we are ready to believe that Edward, as well as Ralph (both old enough now to marry), should, upon the birth of a son so near the time of the death of their honored father, have given him the old family ancestral name. It was a day possibly long-sought-for by those pioneers with no settled pastor, and when the Rev. Jedediah Andrews, the pastor of the First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, came to preach to them, they presented these children to the Lord: Baptized December 21, 1713.

Theophilus Phillips, Anna, Philip, Richard, Abigail, and Elizabeth, children of Philip Phillips (Maidenhead).

David, son of Robert Lanning.

Richard, son of Richard Lanning.

Richard Scudder, at Hopewell.

Ralph Hunt, son of Ralph (Maidenhead).

John, son of Edward Hart (Maidenhead).

Abigail, daughter of Ralph Hart (Maidenhead).

Now, in all this, we are contending for what in all previously prepared papers and histories has never been presented, and are even obliged to dispute an old Bible record, which has to former historians had more weight than any evidence found. In a long and difficult search, extending over a period of several months, in which all possible clues to Hart had been followed, letters from eminent genealogists and local historians have either assured us of the utter impossibility of solving the problem other than as left, or of complete reliance upon what had already been published of John Hart's ancestry, till it would seem as though no case ever appeared more hopeless. It, however, properly belongs to the persistency of one of John Hart's descendants to have pressed the issue to the very end, to whom likewise the public is indebted for these happy results.

Rev. Dr. Cooley, in his *Genealogy of the Early Settlers of Ewing and Trenton*, a valuable book, the manuscript of which, prepared largely by himself, was after his death taken in hand by his son, Professor William S. Cooley of Philadelphia, and finally, upon his decease, completed and printed, in 1883, by the granddaughter of Dr. Cooley, Miss Hannah L. Cooley, states: "John and Joseph Hart came to Hopewell township near the beginning of the eighteenth century, as the name of John is signed to an agreement dated August 26, 1703. They are believed to be brothers, from the fact that they came together, purchased farms adjoining each other, and, above all, from the striking resemblance that their descendants bear to each other even to the fourth and fifth generation." That John and Joseph Hart were brothers is evident. That they came together may also be true. The really important statement in dispute is that because, as is said further on in the book, the descendants of John and Joseph Hart had light hair and eyes, and were called "White Harts,"



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and the descendants of Ralph and Edward Hart had dark or black hair and eyes, therefore they probably were not of the same ancestral line. It is a sufficient refutation of this to refer to the will of Nathaniel Hart, proved March 5, 1742, and on file at Trenton, Liber 4, p. 361. In it mention is made of the wife, Elizabeth, and of the children, Ephraim, Moses, Anne, and Elizabeth; and names as executors, "My brother Joseph Hart and John Hart, son of my brother Edward Hart."

Evidently, therefore, the John Hart mentioned by Dr. Cooley had a brother Joseph, and also brothers Nathaniel and Edward. Turning again to Dr. Cooley, p. 100, we read: "Major Ralph Hart was one of the earliest settlers of Hopewell, and is believed to have come from Stonington, Conn., preceding his brother, Captain Edward, a few years. He purchased a farm adjoining the Lawrence line, on the road leading from Ewingville to Lawrenceville." Consequently another brother is to be added to those above mentioned, and we have an interesting group of sons, all located in the same territory, without a visible ancestor, according to Dr. Cooley—a point that may well be disputed, in view of our disclosures. By the evidence already presented these two lines of the so-called Black and White Harts are united. There is still to be shown the evidence that would make John Hart, the carpenter of Newtown, the ancestor of all of them.

In the absence of all records bearing upon that early period of Hopewell's common life, our success in this would be most problematical but for the fact that we have found by close examination that the farms of Ralph, Edward, and John, and Nathaniel also, were all in the same general locality. The *History of Burlington and Mercer Counties* states that "John Hart's farm was on the west side of Rogers road, leading to Trenton from Hopewell." Presuming this to be the first John Hart, we again note the fact that John Hart, his son, in 1713 disposes of one hundred and seventy acres to G. Cooke, and the land is described as located in the great meadow belonging to Maidenhead—a section of country quite well defined as being between Lawrenceville and Trenton, with the Rogers road on the right and north. A more recent investigation has disclosed the fact that Ralph Hart's farm, now in the possession of one Smith, lies on this very road leading from Lawrenceville to Trenton, and, what is more interesting still, the Temple farm, whereon now lives the last surviving member of the Temple family, into which Sarah Hart, the daughter of Edward, married, is in the neighborhood of where the original John Hart property as above stood. Aged Miss Temple, living on the old farm, states that she had heard her deceased brother, Jesse Temple, say that eight acres of Edward Hart's farm was then a part of the Temple estate, and, more interesting still, that John Hart, the Signer, was born in a house that stood near a spring down the lane on the farm. Consequently, while not, to be sure, conclusive, yet the fact that the brothers are found located so near together accords well with the view that John Hart the carpenter's estate was thus divided, each son sharing in the original farm.

We attach herewith names and dates of such of the brothers' wills as found:

Nathaniel Hart of Hopewell. Will proved March 5, 1742. Wife, Elizabeth; children, Ephraim, Moses, Anne, Elizabeth—the three latter children were minors at the time.



Ralph Hart of Trenton Township. Will proved August 22, 1749. Wife, Sarah; children, Ralph, Benjamin, Samuel, Josiah, Mary (Carpenter), Sarah (Akers), Mercy (Tindal), Martha (Lanning), Elizabeth (Jones), Abigail (Lanning).

John Hart of Hopewell. Will proved March 17, 1753. Wife, Sarah; children, John, Richard, Mary, Elizabeth, Joanna.

No record of any will of Joseph or Edward Hart has been found.

It might be proper to state here that while all authorities touching upon this subject seem to have relied largely upon Dr. Cooley's records, we in no sense conflict with what he has written as the well-proved facts of the case. Unfortunately, he did not live to complete his work, nor have we reason to believe but that, had he been able to follow all the clues in his mind, he would have succeeded in solving many of the problems which appear in his work as "probable." It may rightly be said that no one can complete the genealogical manuscripts of another without great disadvantages, among which must be named that of the impossibility of knowing of those many clues carried in the mind, because not sufficiently verified for any record. In regard to the Harts, Dr. Cooley has not himself affirmed positively as to their origin, nor even as to their early relationship; so that what questions he failed to solve now come within the scope of our research.

Considerable prominence has been given by some to an old Bible record in the family, wherein it states that Edward Hart, the father of John, came from Stonington, Conn. While such testimony does not, as a rule, admit of question, still it may be said, first, that nothing at Stonington reveals any clue to the Harts, even though the records are quite complete; second, according to the statement of one who has examined that Bible record, the note as to Stonington origin was the insertion of a later hand than penned the family record. When and by whom written cannot be determined, but evidently it was a tradition recorded for preservation, and may still be true of the line back beyond the first John, of Newtown. Some of those early settlers at Hopewell did originally spring from New England, even as far east as Salem, Mass., and it has been our impression that there was a connection between the Harts located in Eastern Massachusetts and our own lines, even though a diligent search has failed to reveal the link.

The established line:

1. John Hart<sup>1</sup>, of Newtown, L. I.:

Children: i. John, ii. William, iii. Samuel, iv. Sarah, v. Susan.

2. John Hart<sup>2</sup>, of Newtown, L. I., and Hopewell, N. J., carpenter, married Mary:

Children: i. John, ii. Ralph, iii. Nathaniel, iv. Edward, v. Joseph.

3. Edward Hart<sup>3</sup>, of Hopewell, N. J., married Martha:

Children: i. John, the Signer; ii. Sarah, married Temple Burroughs; iii. Daniel, iv. Martha, v. Edward.

4. John Hart<sup>4</sup>, the Signer, married Deborah Scudder; died 1780:

Children: i. Sarah, ii. Jesse, iii. Martha, iv. Nathaniel, v. John, vi. Susanna, vii. Mary, viii. Abigail, ix. Edward, x. Scudder, xi. Daniel, xii. Deborah.