

Stephen Hopkins' Biggest Achievement by Stephen A. Hopkins

Stephen Hopkins was a man of many achievements. Although not a Separatist, he and his family joined the Pilgrims' journey to the New World perhaps because Stephen had already been to the colony in Jamestown and therefore had experience valuable for the Mayflower group. Stephen, along with his second wife, Elizabeth, their three children and two indentured servants, made the long and dangerous trip aboard the Mayflower in 1620.

Stephen settled in Plymouth with the other Pilgrims. He built one of the larger houses in the colony and, except for a brief stay in Yarmouth, spent the rest of his life in the house on the east corner of Main and Leyden Streets. Records indicate that Stephen was a merchant and planter, but another of his enterprises was evidently a tavern. In those times taverns satisfied the need for beverages, alcoholic and otherwise, and also served as a center for discussions of issues facing the colony.

Carrying the title of Master and Gentleman, Stephen became a leader in the community, particularly in connection with Native American affairs. He was frequently tapped by Captain Miles Standish to be an envoy to the Indians. Chiefs Massasoit and Samoset came to know Stephen well and Samoset stayed at his house when he visited the colony. Without doubt, Stephen Hopkins contributed to the Pilgrims' mutually beneficial relationship with the Native Americans during the settlement's early years.

While Stephen had many achievements during his life, one of his most significant contributions would become apparent only after his death in 1644: the huge number of progeny which resulted from the family he brought to Plymouth and the children he had afterwards.

Stephen Hopkins was baptized April 30, 1581, Upper Clatford, Hampshire, England, son of John and Elizabeth (Williams) Hopkins. Stephen married first, Mary (maiden name unknown), probably in Hampshire, England prior to 1604. They had three children, Elizabeth, Constance and Giles. Mary was buried in Hursley on May 9, 1613. Stephen's second wife was Elizabeth. She may have been Elizabeth Fisher, who married a Stephen Hopkins in London on February, 1617. Prior to their trip on the Mayflower, they had a daughter, Damaris. A son, Oceanus, was delivered in the middle of the ocean, in the cramped quarters of the small, rolling Mayflower, probably in October 1620. He died in 1627.

Stephen and Elizabeth had five more children after settling in the colony: Caleb in 1623, Deborah in 1626, Damaris in 1628 (the first Damaris died before 1627), Ruth in 1630 and Elizabeth in 1632. But only four of Stephen's children reached adulthood, married and had children of their own. These were Constance, Giles, Damaris and Deborah, each of whom had large families, which over future generations resulted in thousands of descendants of the original Stephen Hopkins. For example, Constance, the oldest of Stephen's children married Nicholas Snow in 1627, and over the next 17 years, had Mark, Mary, Sarah, Joseph, Stephen, John, Elizabeth, Jabez, Ruth, and three children whose names have not been conclusively documented--but one may have been Constance, who later married Daniel Doane. In 1645, Constance (Hopkins) Snow settled with her family in that part of East-ham which is now Orleans, near where her brother Giles had already settled in 1644. One can assume that the two families were close and supported each other in this new undertaking in an undeveloped area.

Stephen was the first settler to construct a wharf in the Plymouth harbor, which he sold in 1637. With the proceeds he built a house in Yarmouth to "winter his cattle," according to the Plymouth Colony Records. He was given permission to do so provided he not withdraw from the town of Plymouth

(Plymouth Colony Records, Vol.1, p.93). Stephen duly returned to his house in Plymouth, where he remained until his death in 1644. His son Giles had in the meantime moved to Yarmouth in 1638, where he met Catherine Whelden, his bride-to-be. Before Stephen died, he gave the Yarmouth house to Giles. One wonders whether Stephen purposely set this up to provide Giles with independence from himself.

During their stay in Yarmouth, over the next four years, Giles and Catherine had three children, Mary, Stephen and John (who died at age three months). In 1644, as noted above, Giles and his young family moved to the Tonset area of what is now East Orleans. Catherine gave birth to seven more children, including Joshua, who was born in June 1657. Joshua's significance to our branch of the Hopkins family will later be clarified. Giles died in 1690 and there is now a large monument at his grave site in The Cove Burying Ground off Route Six in Eastham.

Deborah Hopkins, born in 1626, married Andrew Ring in Plymouth on April 23, 1646. They settled in Plymouth and had six children, five daughters and a son William.

Demaris Hopkins, born 1628, married Jacob Cooke in June 1646. From then until 1665, they had seven children, three sons and four daughters. Demaris died probably in 1668 and apparently Jacob remarried since he referred to his "Deare and loving wife, Elizabeth" in his will of December 11, 1675.

Moving along to the third generation, the known children of Nicholas and Constance. (Hopkins) Snow produced 73 children: 32 sons and 41 daughters. The nine children of Giles and Catherine Hopkins produced 44 children: 26 sons and 18 daughters. One of Giles' sons, Joshua, born in Eastham in June 1657, married Mary Cole in May 1681, and they had eight children over the next 21 years. One of those was Joshua, who was born on February 20, 1697. He too became an important chain in our branch of the Hopkins family.

The fourth generations of descendents of Stephen Hopkins were especially prolific. Looking at the offspring of Constance Snow alone, 324 children were born among 49 families, a huge jump above the 73 children born in the third generation. A key reason for this amazing growth was the size of these new families, which typically ranged between eight and 12 children. Indeed, John Paine had 16 children (with two wives). The descendents of Giles Hopkins demonstrated even greater productivity in the fourth generation, with 348 children among the 46 families, which included Hopkins's, Merricks, one Mayo, Rings, Cooke's, and Morton's. Again most of these families had between eight and 12 children.

Thus, the fourth generation of Snow and Hopkins descendents, consisting of 95 families, produced 672 children, six times the number of children born in the third generation.

One reason for the large size of families in those times, which played such a prominent role in this huge increase, was of course the lack of birth control. Equally important, however, was the fact that in an economy based mainly on agriculture and fishing, the labor power of children was a necessity. Big families were still common on Cape Cod through the nineteenth century. My grandfather, Josiah Hopkins, who was born on

October 14, 1848, lived on Tonset Road in East Orleans. By three wives, Josiah had 10 children, including my father, Reuben Hopkins, born on April 4, 1895.

It is noted that the figures I used above were derived from "Mayflower Families Through Five Generations, Volume Six, Third Edition, Stephen Hopkins", published by The General Society of Mayflower Descendents in 2001, authored by John D. Austin.

If we extrapolate the number of descendents who potentially exist today by applying a factor of three, rather than the six-fold figure of the fourth generation, and used the three factor figure over the seven generations which developed after the fourth generation, up to the present, we would have a total in

excess of 1.4 million descendents. And mind you, this does not include the descendents of Deborah and Demaris Hopkins.

Joshua Hopkins, mentioned above, did little to contribute to the huge surge in the fourth generation. He had only three children, two daughters and a son, Joshua, born in 1725. But that one son was vital in the development of our present family. This Joshua married Rebecca Sparrow in May 1747 and they more than made up for his father's shortfall by having 10 children, including the third Joshua, born on September 19, 1753. From this third Joshua, the Hopkins descendents in our chain were as follows: Curtis Hopkins, born October 26, 1772; Josiah Hopkins, born October 20, 1803; Josiah C. Hopkins, born October 14, 1848; Reuben S. B. Hopkins, born April 15, 1895; and myself, born April 25, 1932. I have eight children, including two sons, Christopher and Joshua, and they have fourteen children, including four boys. And so "the beat goes on".

Everyone in our Hopkins line, going back to Giles Hopkins, has lived continuously in the Tonset area of Orleans. From time to time, maps of different areas of the Town were prepared which showed the locations and owners of houses on the roads of the particular area depicted. We have one such map, circa 1885, which covers the Tonset area. On this map, some 15 houses are indicated as being Hopkins owned.

Our Hopkins line is unique in that they have all lived in this one small area of Cape Cod. In the big scheme of things, however, our line is small and insignificant, compared to the number of Stephen Hopkins descendents now living across our nation - perhaps close to two million persons. Yes, the original Stephen Hopkins accomplished a great deal during his life. But little did he dream that he would, over the years, through one generation to the next, have such vast numbers of progeny. Stephen A. Hopkins was born on April 25 1932 in the home of a midwife, Nettie Knowles, located next to the Old Cove Burial Ground in Eastham, Massachusetts. His mother was Lucy Knowles Hopkins. Ironically, the birthing room where he was born looked out upon the grave marker of Giles Hopkins, Mr. Hopkins' distant ancestor.

Mr. Hopkins grew up in the Tonset area of East Orleans, and after graduating from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, he spent two years in the Army stationed in Stuttgart, Germany.

He graduated from Boston College Law School in 1961, and after a year as a law clerk, he spent the next 36 years as a trial attorney in Boston. Mr. Hopkins retired in 1998 and now spends the winter months with his wife, Sylvia, at their home in Anguilla and the summer months at their house off Hopkins Lane in the Tonset area, located on land that originally had been in the Hopkins family for several centuries.

In his retirement, Mr. Hopkins has written stories about growing up in Orleans and various events in his life thereafter. These interesting stories have been published in two books, the first "Three Dollars Just Same" and the second "Memoirs of a Cape Codder". The first is sold in local book stores and the second can be obtained through Authorhouse.com and Amazon.com.