

Descendants of William Owen  
(ca 1611-1703)

FOREWARD

by Henry W. Owen  
written ca 1900-1956



## FOREWORD

The following tables of Owen kindred are the result of research originally undertaken to satisfy my personal curiosity in regard to family history, and particularly in regard to the degree of relationship among numerous groups of Owens in Maine. They present in condensed form the relationships and something of the history of the descendants of that John Owen who became a settler and proprietor in Falmouth about 1723 when that Massachusetts town was in its infancy, a frontier settlement which two centuries have transformed into the bustling city of Portland, Maine. They also present some of the other descendants of that William Owen who married Elizabeth Davies at Braintree, Mass., in 1650 and who, I have been told from infancy by older members of the family, was the grandfather of John who lived in Falmouth.

Whether the Braintree connection of John Owen of Falmouth was traditional in the family or was the conclusion of some previous investigator I have no knowledge. I have not known it to be disputed nor have I found any disproof; but it must be said that I have found no positive proof. I accept it, and have not given up hope of one day finding definite proof.

William Owen of Braintree had a son Nathaniel whose youngest son, John, was born in 1699 according to the Braintree records. There is no further trace of this John in Braintree. Nathaniel died in November 1733, leaving a will dated in April preceding. This document, still preserved in the files of the Suffolk County Probate Court, is signed by a hand strikingly like my father's. The will bequeaths to the eldest son, Benjamin, certain real estate with this condition: "He paying to the Treasurer of Harvard College in Cambridge £30 which I have obliged myself to pay to the sd Treasurer, viz. Edward Hutchinson, Esq." Further down among the bequests, after sons Joseph and William, appears the following item: "I have given to my son John Owen a liberal education to which I add five shillings."

The obvious presumption from the two clauses quoted, though the language of the will does not directly connect them, would be that John went to Harvard and the debt was incurred on his account. It is, moreover, a fact that a John Owen was graduated from Harvard in the class of 1723, and according to the general catalogue, died in 1753.

John Owen of Falmouth arrived in that place in 1723 and died in 1753. He had moreover an education superior to the average since he represented the town in court as counsel and received a special land grant for his services. Here then we seem to have strong circumstantial evidence to prove the identity of the Falmouth settler as the Harvard graduate and the son of Nathaniel.

But, oddly enough, there were two educated John Owens who both died in New England in 1753, the other being Rev. John who passed from this life in Connecticut January 13 of that year in the 55th year of his age, indicating birth in 1698. Although the Braintree record places the birth of Nathaniel's son John in 1699, the fact that both birth and death records are often found erroneous would bar a snap conclusion that the clergyman was not Nathaniel's son. Mr. Clifford K. Shipton who has been engaged in the interest of Harvard Biographies in extensive research to determine which of the John Owens who died in 1753 was the Harvard man of 1723 is convinced that it was the clergyman. He is not, however, able to prove that the clergyman was Nathaniel's son. In our brief correspondence on the subject Mr. Shipton expresses the belief that the Falmouth Owens were of the Braintree family, and suggests that the debt referred to in Nathaniel's will could have been incurred in helping a nephew, perhaps, through college; and that John Owen of Falmouth may have been sent to Latin school, assuming him to be the son of Nathaniel.

As to the debt, the language quoted above from the will certainly implies that the college was the creditor. When, however, Benjamin Owen who was charged with repaying it, mortgaged some land apparently in connection with the matter, the mortgage, dated 1737, ran to "Edward Hutchinson of Boston, Esq., treasurer of Harvard College." This phraseology would imply that Hutchinson personally and not Harvard was the party involved, the words "treasurer of Harvard College" simply an identifying description. Nathaniel Owen is shown to have had, in fact, business contact with Hutchinson other than educational by an indenture dated 1715 between Nathaniel Owen and his wife Mary on the one part, and on the other Andrew Belcher, Addington Davenport and Thomas Hutchinson, Esqs., and John White and Edward Hutchinson, Gents., who were commissioners of the General Court for the issuance of bills of credit.

Certain further scraps of circumstantial evidence bear upon the question of the parentage of John Owen of Falmouth. He named two daughters successively Mary, apparently a tribute to Mary, the wife of Nathaniel. This is somewhat weakened by an equal fondness for the name Thomas, given to two sons, which does not appear by any direct evidence in the family of either William or Nathaniel. The fourth son, however, was named William. The five shilling bequest could be or could indicate the reason why none of John's seven sons was named Nathaniel. It is an odd fact that none of the grandsons of Nathaniel bore that name except for the son of his son Nathaniel. The omission, therefore, in John's family is not very significant. When John Owen of Falmouth made his own will he followed the form and in the first paragraph the exact language of Nathaniel's will. There is the further circumstance that Ebenezer Owen, who would be nephew of John if John be Nathaniel's son, followed John to Falmouth. Moreover, among a long list of John Owens born in New England, no other except Nathaniel's son could have been the settler who appeared in Falmouth in 1723.

In the correspondence of the Pejepscot Proprietors there is a reference to a John Owen who "came to the margin of the Kennebec" at the time when they were promoting their settlement called Augusta at Small Point Harbor. That project was initiated about 1716 and the place was abandoned in 1724. This John Owen arrived from Salem, but no indication has been found that he settled at Augusta or anywhere else in the Kennebec region. It could be that he looked the prospects over in the Pejepscot Proprietors' territory and then found something more to his liking at Falmouth. An effort has therefore been made to follow this lead.

There were Owen families at both Salem and the adjoining town of Marblehead prior to 1723 and both these families seem to have been closely connected with the Braintree family. Morgan Owen of Salem married there in 1670 and died some two years later leaving a son John born in 1671 and a son Nathaniel who "lived not long." John married in 1687 Mary Tucksberry. I have found no record that this John and Mary had a son John. If they did and it could be shown, he might possibly qualify as the Falmouth settler. In the Marblehead Owen family there were a number of Johns, but each of these is definitely otherwise accounted for. Since, however, both these families seem to have been related to the Braintree family, and were seamen, what more natural than that a member of the Braintree family, setting out to seek his fortune in Maine, should set out via Salem?

#### The Rhode Island Owens

While I have not thus far been able to definitively bridge the gap between Braintree and Falmouth, I have been able to prove the Braintree origin of the Owens of Rhode Island, and the story of their origin is one of romantic interest as well as illustrative of manners and customs of the seventeenth century in New England.

By way of prelude it should be said that a genealogical table of the Rhode Island family was prepared in 1857 by a Mr. S. C. Newman who describes himself as member of the Rhode Island Historical Society and genealogical secretary of the Blackstone Monument Association. His Owen table was prepared for George and Smith Owen and purports to show the descendants of a Samuel and Priscilla Owen through a son Josiah who was born in 1681. According to the brief text, "Samuel Owen was born in Wales, Europe, A.D. 1651. He and his wife, Priscilla Belcher, with their son, Josiah, came to America about 1685. Like most early settlers, his object in leaving his native land was the enjoyment of Civil and Religious Liberty and the pursuit of Agriculture. He came first to Massachusetts, but finding that the Colony of Rhode Island was then the most independent in matters of conscience and religious opinion, he finally settled in that part of Providence now known as North Providence and not far from the present Pawtucket Turnpike."

Newman does not cite authorities for his statements, and my effort to learn something about the author himself, or from mem-

bers of the Rhode Island family to obtain some light as to the source from which Newman might have drawn for his statements, have been completely unproductive. My own researches, however, have failed to disclose any other trace whatever of either a Samuel or a Priscilla Owen in Rhode Island at the period these are supposed to have been there, nor in Massachusetts a couple with those names. Josiah, however, was a person frequently met with in the records.

Among the sons of William Owen of Braintree were an Ebenezer and a Josiah, the latter being the younger. Ebenezer had a wife, Hannah, who is sufficiently well proved by circumstantial evidence to have been daughter of John and Sarah Belcher of Braintree. Ebenezer and Hannah had a son Josiah whose birth 15 May 1687 is on record at Braintree. Ebenezer served in Captain Johnson's company in the campaign of 1675 against the Narraganset Indians, and in 1690 he served in the unsuccessful expedition of Sir William Phipps against Quebec. During the return voyage, Ebenezer died of small pox and was buried at sea off Cape Ann, leaving Hannah a widow, she being then aged 26.

In 1691 on Christmas day, Hannah was haled before the Court of Assistants at Boston on the charge "for that by indirect means and by the connivance of some Josiah Owen and sd Hannah Owen procured a marriage, they being within the line of kindred of affinity forbidden marriage by the Word of God and the Statutes of England." Hannah pleaded guilty by acknowledging that "she was sd Josiah Owen's Brother's Relict." The court thereupon directed that the relation should be broken off forthwith and that Hannah should on the following Sunday appear before the Braintree congregation and make public confession of her transgression. At the same time the court by letter advised the Braintree pastor of its action.

In the disciplinary record kept by the Braintree pastors, Rev. Moses Fiske set down that on receipt of this message he, with Major Quincy and Deacon Thompson, went to discourse with Hannah. Unexpectedly they found with her at their cottage Josiah who had eluded the civil authorities. The good pastor and his retinue undertook to bring Josiah to a suitable state of repentance, but finding him "obstinate and reflecting," charged him to be present in the congregation the following Sunday to hear what should be said to him there. The clergyman also records that Josiah was urged by his father to be compliant. Instead, Josiah and Hannah fled the jurisdiction before Sunday arrived. Josiah was solemnly excommunicated at the service which he thus missed.

There are subsequent references to Josiah in the Braintree records but none definitely indicating that he was present in the town. Several of these relate to putting up to Josiah matters relating to Ebenezer's "distracted daughter." Beginning in 1701 the Providence records contain frequent references to Josiah Owen Sr. and Josiah Owen Jr. who are described as uncle and nephew in a conveyance of land in 1703, the latter of course being Ebenezer's son. Josiah Jr. married in Providence Mary Estance about 1706 and the next year her father, Thomas Estance, conveyed to him 150 acres west of the seven-mile line, of which a few years later he conveyed half to Josiah Sr. Hannah's petition in 1701 for administration by the Suffolk court of her first husband's estate describes her then as of Providence. There can be no manner of

doubt that this family were the Braintree exiles, nor can there be any that Josiah, Jr., was the patriarch of the family of Mr. Newman's table. Newman must have supplied parents for Josiah from a tradition handed down in the family and which in the course of 150 years of oral transmission had become blurred and the names altered except Hannah's family name. The factual story dug piece by piece from Massachusetts records could easily be the basis for the little Newman tells about Samuel and Priscilla.

#### William Owen

The antecedents of William Owen who married Elizabeth Davies at Braintree on the 29th day of the 7th month 1650 (Old Style) have not been traced. The marriage record is the first evidence of his presence in Braintree. He was one of a considerable number of Owen immigrants to North America and the off shore islands in the first half of the 17th century. He appears to have been very closely related, probably a brother, of John Owen who about the same time settled at Windsor, Conn. Sons of each were named Daniel, Nathaniel, Josiah and Obadiah. The late Dr. Frederick Wooster Owen recalled having seen somewhere mention of a case, Owen vs. Davies, in the Chancery Court in London, suggesting a previous acquaintance of the families united at Braintree.

The ship Hopewell, Capt. Thomas Wood, which cleared from the port of London for Barbados 17 February 1634 (1635 New Style) contained among 150 passengers a William Owen, age 23; a John Owen, age 20, and an Owen Williams, age 21. The following April the ship Elizabeth, Capt. William Stagg, sailing from London for New England, carried among 28 passengers, mostly women, Margaret Davies, aged 32, and her three children of whom the youngest was Elizabeth, aged one year. It is possible that William Owen of the Hopewell was the same appearing 15 years later in Braintree. The infant Elizabeth Davies on the ship Elizabeth is known to be the same who married William Owen at Braintree. Her mother, Margaret, became the wife of Charles Grice of Braintree who in his will described William as his "son."

Of William's biography we know little. In records he has the title, Mr., indicating gentility. He purchased his farm bordering Braintree Common, indicating means. He was made freeman of Braintree in 1651, for which the qualifications were church membership, property ownership and quality. His amiability is attested by the tribute of Mr. Grice to William's filial care and love toward him in testator's old age. At his death in January 1702/3, William had lived in Braintree upwards of 52 years. If the Hopewell's passenger, his life was about 90 years. Such references as we find indicate that he was much respected. He certainly was no advertiser, and seems to have held no offices. Thus he seems to have had similar qualities to many of his descendants, such as little disposition to seek public office, natural politeness and consideration, and domestic inclinations.

The births of 6 children to William and Elizabeth are recorded in Braintree, namely: Daniel in 1651, Deliverance in 1654, Ebenezer in 1657, a second Daniel in 1659, a son who is not named in 1667 and Obadiah in 1670. The intervals seem to suggest that there may have been others, and two such are definitely proved, namely Nathaniel and Josiah. Dr. F. W. Owen had a birthdate, for

Nathaniel, 1656, for which I do not know his authority. Josiah might have been the son born in 1667. That there are names missing which we might expect to find, such as William and John, is certain. There are, moreover, possible candidates for the vacancies. Morgan Owen of Salem is one, particularly on account of the names John and Nathaniel which he gave to his sons. He would have married very young, however, were a child of William and Elizabeth; but we have no assurance that Elizabeth was William's first wife. It seems very probable that Thomas Owen of Marblehead who married about 1680 and named a daughter Deliverance, and William Owen of Boston who married in 1693 and named his first child Elizabeth were sons of William and Elizabeth.

#### General Remarks

As a genealogy of the descendants of William Owen, the tables here presented are no more than a nucleus since they cover at most no more than three or four generations except for the Maine and Rhode Island branches which are more extensively covered. The Maine families in general have been brought closely down to date. By far the larger part of the tables presented represent original and painstaking research. The principal exception is the use in toto of Mr. Newman's Rhode Island table of the male descendants of Josiah of Providence, which in some cases have been amplified with information from other sources.

There have not been many other delvers in the field covered. In 1864 Mr. Howard Owen, then a busy editor, printed a small pamphlet ambitiously entitled "The Owen Family," for private circulation. This deals exclusively with descendants of John Owen, Jr., the son of the Falmouth settler. What information it contains about those two is very incomplete and inaccurate, and mixes the two men inextricably. Apparently this part of the text came from Willis's History of Portland. More valuable was information of later members of that branch which was obtained by Mr. Owen from relatives then living.

Dr. Frederick Wooster Owen during his long life interested himself in the family history and from time to time had done some research in the field. I had the benefit of several long letters from him on the subject when he was a very old man. From the similarity of particulars which he wrote me with those in parts of Mr. Sinnett's manuscript, I suspect the good doctor may have been the real author of some of Sinnett's glaring errors. Dr. Owen's temperament was fanciful and he seems to have in some cases jumped at conclusions not warranted by the premise. He was interested and intelligent, however, and knew a great deal about the generation to which he belonged and the one before which was first hand and dependable and which we could wish he had written out more fully.

Rev. Charles Sinnett did his work in the early part of the present century. A manuscript of his entitled "Descendants of William Owen of Braintree" is preserved in the New England His-



toric-Genealogical Society library and is dated 1922. It contains many inaccuracies, but he did a real service in preserving material obtained by correspondence from members of the family then living.

Finally, during his retired leisure, George Henry Owen, then in Washington, prepared for his immediate family a typewritten manuscript of a few pages entitled "Genealogical Notes on Our Branch of the Owen Family." This dealt very largely with his immediate family and first hand information from or pertaining to the generations he personally had known.

All of these have been of much service in connection with the compilation of the present tables.

It is to be hoped that some day a comprehensive genealogy of all American Owens may be completely compiled - no small undertaking but well worth while.

Seventeenth century immigrants of the name included in addition to William of Braintree and John of Windsor, Thomas Owen, Boston, 1639-1641; Benjamin, who arrived in Virginia in 1623; Richard, on Long Island, N. Y., 1656-8; Samuel of Springfield and Brookfield, Mass.; Griffith, founder of the Pennsylvania family, and a number of others. There have been others who came later, even down to recent times. Two notable immigrants directly to Maine were John Owen who settled in Buxton about the time of the Revolution and Luke who came to Paris. In Maine I have found a number of Owens whose forebears came from New Brunswick and possibly might be traced thence back to Massachusetts in some instances at least. The progeny of the original immigrants have multiplied and spread across the country, and these numerous individual migrations from state to state, together with the duplication of names, greatly complicate the task of tracing the various lines.

The family is of Welsh origin, and is said to have derived from a line of Welsh princes. The name descended from Owen ap Howell Dha who was king of South Wales and Powys A.D. 987 and who was himself a descendant of the eighth generation from Eliseg, Prince of Powys. This carries the family back to the eighth century. Throughout the centuries since lustre has been given to the name by many distinguished figures in both the British Isles and America.

In America there are also Owen families originating in Ireland. These more generally use the form Owens, but not universally. Whether there is any ancient connection between the Welsh family called Owen and the Irish family called Owens is not known to me. The omission of the s by some of the Irish families and the perversity with which some clerks insist on attaching an s where it does not belong increase the difficulties of the researcher. In colonial documents one finds the family name sometimes spelled Oen, Ouen and other more or less phonetic forms.

For the sake of brevity I have limited my tables to the male lines, not going beyond the children of Owen daughters. In many cases my files contain more ample information in regard to descendants of these Owen ladies. Such information as I have is available to anyone interested.

My search into the annals of the family has impressed me with the general respectability and rectitude of those of the Owen name. By and large the descendants of William Owen have been industrious, church-going and law-abiding and respected. Instances of real lapses from good conduct are altogether a rarity. The name seems to stand for a native gentility and a high order of intelligence. As a rule one finds the Owens doing their work faithfully but unostentatiously, sometimes in humble and sometimes in high stations. Many have left distinguished records as soldiers, seamen, scientists, writers, clergymen, physicians, lawyers, jurists and business men. They are usually too open handed to become very wealthy, and too considerate of others to engage in sharp practices which often constitute the road to wealth. As a rule they are democratic and unassuming, indisposed to self-advertisement, indifferent to the lure of riches, independent, disposed to form their own opinions, and not easily swayed from them. In short one usually finds them gentlemen in fact as well as by descent. As an old lady once said to me when asked what she knew of certain Owens, "Oh, they were quality!"

(signed)

Henry W. Owen, Jr.