

Vital Statistics for The Family Members

Marblehead

Births

MERRIT (Merritt)

CHILDREN OF NICHOLAS AND ELIZABETH ASHTON MERRITT:

Elizabeth, d. Elizabeth, bp. Mar. 30, 1690. CR1
 Nicholas, s. Elezabeth, bp. Mar. 13, 1691-2. CR1
 Mary, d. Elizabeth, bp. May 27, 1694. CR1
 Samuel, s. Elizabeth, bp. Mar. 8, 1695-6. CR1
 Elizabeth, d. Elizabeth, bp. May 8, 1698. CR1
 Mary, d. Elizabeth, bp. May 12, 1700. CR1
 Nicholas, s. Elizabeth, bp. Mar. 29, 1702. CR1
 Rebecca, d. Nicholas and Elizbeth, bp. May 14, 1704. CR1
 David, s. Nicholas, bp. Feb. 11, 1704-5. CR1
 Jane, d. Nicholas and Elizabeth, bp. Mar. 10, 1705-6. CR1




AND THEIR GRANDCHILDREN:

CHILDREN OF SAMUEL AND CHARITY SAUNDERS MERRITT:

Miriam, d. Samuel and Charity, bp. Aug. 10, 1718. CR1
 Elizabeth, d. Samuel and Charity, bp. Feb. 5, 1720-21. CR1
 Nicholas, s. Samuel and Charity, bp. Sept. 30, 1722. CR1
 Charity, d. Samuel and Charity, bp. Aug. 25, 1728. CR1

PEARSE (Pierce)

CHILDREN OF JOHN AND ELIZABETH MERRITT PEARSE

John, s. John and Elizabeth, bp. Jan. 6, 1717. CR2
 { Elizabeth, d. twin, John and Elizabeth, bp. Aug. 16, 1719. CR2
 Mary, d. twin, John and Elizabeth, bp. Aug. 16, 1719. CR2
 Sarah, d. John and Elizabeth, bp. July 9, 1721. CR2
 John, s. John and Elizabeth, bp. Jan. 19, 1724. CR2
 Rebecca, d. John and Elizabeth, bp. Feb. 6, 1726. CR2
 Rebecca, d. John and Elizabeth, bp. Feb. 12, 1727. CR2
 { Jane, d. twin, John and Elizabeth, bp. Feb. 23, 1729. CR2
 Mehitable, d. twin, John Elizabeth, bp. Feb. 23, 1729. CR2
 Anna, d. John and Elizabeth, bp. Jan. 7, 1733. CR2
 Ruhamah, d. John and Elizabeth, bp. Jan. 19, 1735. CR2
 { Martha, d. twin, John and Elizabeth, bp. Jan. 1, 1738. CR2
 Ruhamah, d. twin, John and Elizabeth, bp. Jan. 1, 1738. CR2
 Nathaniel, s. John and Elizabeth, bp. Sept. 23, 1739. CR2

PIERCE (Pearce, Pearse, Peirce, Piarce)

CHILDREN OF JOHN AND MARY MERRITT PIERCE

Elizabeth, d. Robert and Mary, bp. July 26, 1719. CR1
 Richard, s. Robert and Mary, bp. Jan. 15, 1720-21. CR1
 Mary, d. Robert and Mary, bp. Sept. 5, 1725. CR1
 Elizabeth, d. Robert and Mary, bp. Nov. 5, 1727. CR2
 Robert, s. Robert and Mary, bp. Dec. 9, 1722. CR1

CHILDREN OF NICHOLAS AND JEAN GIFFORD MERRITT:

Nathaniel, s. Nicholas, 3d and Jean, bp. Oct. 17, 1725. CR1
 Elizabeth, d. Nicholas and Jean, bp. Nov. 12, 1727. CR1
 Mary, d. Nicholas, 3d and Jean, bp. Oct. 26, 1729. CR1

GIFFARD (Gifford)

CHILDREN OF ROBERT AND REBECCA MERRITT GIFFARD

Robert, s. Robert, jr. and Rebekah, bp. Apr. 26, 1730. CR1
 William, s. Robert and Rebecca, bp. Feb. 13, 1731-2. CR1
 Merritt, s. Robert, jr. and Rebeckah, bp. July 28, 1734. CR1
 Nicholas Merrett, s. Robert and Rebecca, bp. Mar. 5, 1737-8. CR1
 Rebeccah, d. Robert and Rebeccah, bp. Nov. 7, 1742. CR1
 Elizabeth, d. Robert and Rebekah, bp. Sept. 1, 1745. CR1

PEDERICK (Pedrick)

CHILDREN OF RICHARD AND JEAN MERRITT PEDERICK

Jean, d. Richard and Jean, bp. Apr. 18, 1725. CR1
 Richard, s. Richard and Jean, bp. Nov. 5, 1727. CR1
 Jean, d. Richard and Jean, bp. July 11, 1731. CR1
 Mary, d. Richard and Jean, bp. July 15, 1733. CR1
 Nathaniel, s. Richard and Jean, bp. Mar. 2, 1734-5. CR1
 Elizabeth, d. Richard and Jean, bp. Nov. 7, 1736. CR1
 Ruhamah, d. Richard and Jean, bp. Dec. 10, 1738. CR1
 Miriam, d. Richard and Jean, bp. Aug. 2, 1741. CR1
 Rebeckah, d. Richard and Jean, bp. June 26, 1743. CR1
 Sarah, d. Richard and Jean, bp. Aug. 11, 1745. CR1
 John Pierce, s. Richard and Jean, bp. Mar. 15, 1746-7

Marblehead

Marriages

MERRITT (Merett, Merret, Merrett, Merrit)

Elizabeth, and John Pearce, Nov. 30, 1715.
 Samuel, and Charity Saunders, June 24, 1717.
 Mary, and Robert Pierce, Dec. 10, 1717. CR1
 Jean, and Richard Pederick, Nov. 16, 1721.
 Rebecca, and Robert Gifford, Oct. 8, 1722.
 Nicholas [3 d. CR1], and Jane Giffard, Dec. 2, 1724.

Marblehead

Deaths

MERRITT (Merett, Merrett, Merrit)

Nicholas, sr., June —, 1736. CR1

Son Samuel Merritt

No. 18353

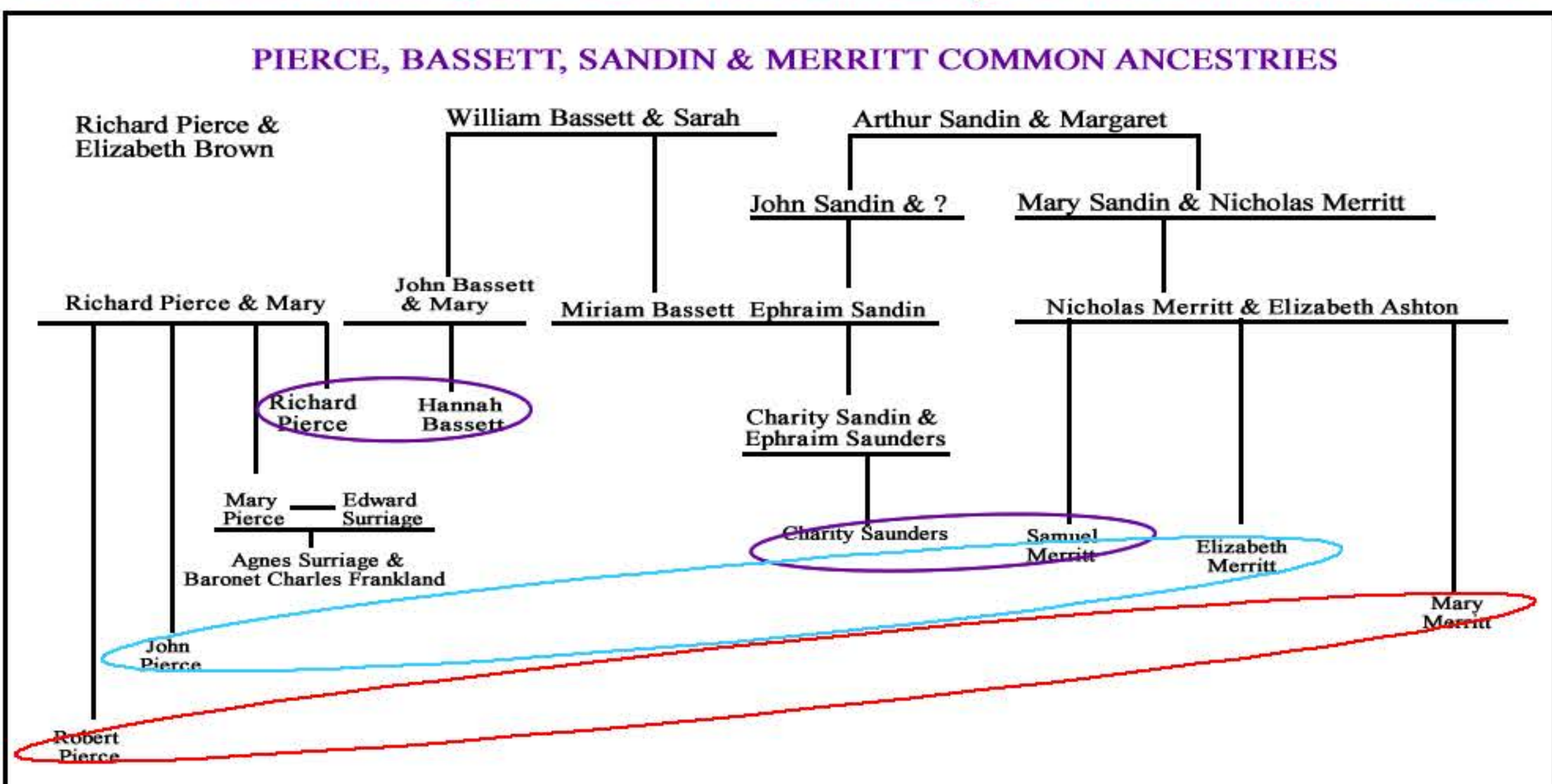
Merritt

Samuel, fisherman.

1732. Jan. 3.

Richard Merritt
all men by their parents had me Charis
Merritt widow of Richard Merritt
John Merritt of Marblehead

The Tree Section Below Shows Some of the Relationships for the Four Named Families



Some Information about the Pierce Family

<p>NAME: Richard Pearce; Pierce; Peirce</p> <p>COMMENT: carpenter, Muscongus, bought of "Capt. John Summerset" [Samoset], Indian sagamore, a tract of land at Round Pond and Pemaquid river, 9 Jan. 1641. He is called "brother in law" by John Brown, Jr. of Pemaquid and Framingham.</p> <p>His children, Richard, born about 1647, John, born about 1652, George, born about 1662, and Elizabeth, (married Richard Fullford,) removed to Salem, Mass. The sons testified to the above Nov. 29, 1717, and made an agreement together with their deceased sister Elizabeth's daughter, Elizabeth, wife of Samuel Martin.</p> <p>[Ess. De. 37, 257, and Gen. Adv. I, 95.]</p> <p>See also Bachiler, Pierce.</p>	<p style="color: green; font-weight: bold;">Maine: Early Wills & Deeds</p> <p>Volume 17, p. 422</p> <p>YORK DEEDS VOLUME XVII 422</p> <p>To all Persons to whom these Presents shall come Greeting Know Ye that we Richard Pearce of Marblehead in the County of Essex in his Majesties Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England Marriner John Pearce of Marblehead in the County & Province afores^d Baker and Edward Surriage of Pemaquid in the County of York & Province afores^d Marriner for & in Consideration of Love good will & Affection which we have & do bear to our Loving Friend Daniel M^cClester in the County of York have given & do hereby give freely & absolutely to him s^d Daniel M^cClester his Heirs Exec^{rs} or Adm^{rs} Two Acres of Land in our Share of the first Division of our Lands at a Place known by the name of Miscongus bounded by the River Eastwardly Sixteen Rod wide upon the front & from thence running North West & Fifty Acres of Land Adjoyning to s^d Two Acres and Fifty Acres of Land more in our Share of the Second Division of s^d Land To have & to hold all his Lands to him his Heirs Exec^{rs} or Adm^{rs} as his own property Upon Condition that he s^d Daniel M^cClester inclose & build a Dwelling House upon s^d Two Acres [being y^e Second House Lot from the Northerly Bounds of s^d Share] And Live upon it or some place upon s^d River for y^e Space of three Years [or cause some other Famaly to live there in his Stead for s^d Space of three years ensuing y^e Date hereof] The House to be Built & c within the space of a Year ensuing the Date hereof] In Witness whereof we have hereto set our Hands & Seals this thirteenth Day of Septemb^r in the eighth year of y^e Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second by the Grace of God of great Britain France & Ireland King &c</p> <p>[214] Married Elizabeth Merritt Richard Pearce (*Seal) Married Mary Merritt John Pearce (*Seal) Daughter Mary m. Sir Charles Frankland Edw^d Surriage (*Seal) Son Isaac married Jean's daughter Ruhamah Pedrick Mary Surriage (Seal)</p> <p>Signed Sealed & Delivered in Presence of David Allen Joseph Kent York ss/Sept^r 14. 1734. M^r Richard Pearce John Pearce Edw^d Surriage & Mary his wife all Personally appeared & Acknowledg^d the above Instrument to be their voluntary Act & Deed Coram James Woodside Jus^s Pac^{is}</p> <p>A true Copy of y^e Orig^l rec^d Oct^r 14. 1735.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Attest Jer. Moulton Reg^r</p>
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Daughter Jean Merritt and Some of her Family

5. RICHARD³ PEDRICK (John², John¹) was baptized 13 July 1701 and was probably dead by 7 April 1766 when his brother Joseph was appointed administrator of their father's estate. He married 16 November 1721, JEAN/JANE MERRETT, probably baptised 10 March 1705/6. She was probably the daughter of Nicholas and Elizabeth () Merrett.

Citation
 The Essex Genealogist. (Online database. AmericanAncestors.org, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2011.)
<https://www.americanancestors.org/DB396/1/12785/146/144191537>

The Rags-to-Riches Story That Eventually Again Involved the Merritts

The Essex Antiquarian: An Illustrated ... Magazine Devoted to the Biography, Genealogy, History and Antiquities of Essex County, Massachusetts. Volume 2

FOUNTAIN INN, MARBLEHEAD. BY SIDNEY PERLEY.

William Bartlett, sen., of Marblehead, yeoman and fisherman, and his wife Sarah, conveyed to their son Nathaniel Bartlett of Marblehead, mariner and innholder, Jan. 7, 1720-1, "a small piece of land where his cellar now is in our orchard before our mansion house at Little Harbor."* Aug. 22, 1723, Nathaniel Bartlett, sen., of Marblehead, shoreman, executor of the will of his uncle Nathaniel Walton, late of Marblehead, deceased, conveyed to his cousin Nathaniel Bartlett, jr., of Marblehead, mariner and innholder, a piece of land on which the deceased's barn and cow-house formerly stood, where the grantee "hath set up a new house."† This was probably the house that became the Fountain Inn.

Nathaniel Bartlett died here, while conducting the tavern, in 1749.

FOUNTAIN INN, MARBLEHEAD.

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of her poverty and need dawned upon him. Lover of the beautiful in everything, he felt the wrong he should do if he failed to better her condition. He asked her if she would like to be educated; to leave that drudgery. He obtained permission of her parents; gave her the advantages of the best schools in Boston; and she became an accomplished lady. They loved each other; and a few years later charges of improper intimacy were made. His family and social pride forbade his marrying one of lowly birth. Boston society refused to longer recognize them; and Frankland bought a tract of land in Hopkinton, where, upon a commanding site, he erected a manor house and laid out beautiful and extensive grounds. At this country seat, he lived, together with Agnes and her family, a life more or less secluded.

Being called to England on business in 1754, Frankland and Agnes sailed for London. English society refused her admission to its circle; and as soon after as possible the couple took a trip through Europe, proceeding to Lisbon, where they entered into the gay, fashionable life of the Portuguese. While pursuing its round of pleasures on the day of the great earthquake of November, 1755, he was riding with a lady to attend a church service, and both were buried beneath the walls of a falling building. The lady and horses were killed, but Frankland was saved. The incident, with all the shock of his narrow escape, brought him to his senses; and while buried beneath the ruins solemnly vowed that he would live a better life.

Agnes, upon the first intimation of the earthquake ran out of her house, where she was alone, into the street, and was saved. Almost wild with excitement, she wandered about the ruins in the streets, and heard Frankland's voice calling for help. She labored with almost superhuman strength to remove the debris that covered him, and at length was rewarded. His wounds were dressed at a house; then he sent for a priest, and Agnes Surriage became the Lady Agnes Frankland.

The incident which has caused this old inn to be remembered is that relative to Agnes Surriage, a daughter of Edward Surriage, a poor fisherman of the village. Late in the summer of 1742, when she was fifteen, she assisted in doing the work about the tavern. She was very pretty and artless, and possessed of a sweet and musical voice. While she was scrubbing the stairs, her feet bare, a coach drawn by four horses stopped at the door. From the carriage alighted Sir Charles Henry Frankland, then collector of customs at Boston. He was young and fine-looking, and accustomed to the best English society. As he entered the inn he saw the girl, and was greatly impressed by her face, despite the environment of her mean, torn and soiled garments. He called her to him, and gave her some money to buy a pair of shoes.

Frankland visited the town several times as he was superintending the construction of the fort here. The next time he saw the girl her feet were still bare, and he asked her why she had not purchased the shoes. She replied that she had, but kept them for Sunday wear. The extent

They returned to England, and on their passage had the marriage rite performed by an English clergyman. The Frankland family in London received her with every mark of esteem, and society of their rank welcomed her.

A short time afterward they returned to Boston, purchased a fine house for their winter home, retaining their beautiful estate in Hopkinton for their summer residence.

Being appointed consul-general of Portugal in 1757, he and his wife resided in Lisbon for several years. In 1763, they returned to Massachusetts, living upon the Hopkinton estate until he removed to Bath, England, when he died in 1768, at the age of fifty-two.

Lady Frankland returned to Hopkinton, where she remained till the breaking out of the Revolution, in the summer of 1775, when she returned to England. While waiting in Boston to sail, from the windows of her residence she watched the battle of Bunker Hill on June 17. Arriving in England, she resided for several years with the Frankland family. She then married John Drew, esq., a wealthy banker of Chichester in Sussex. She died April 23, 1783, aged fifty-five; and in the burial ground of St. Pancras Church, Chichester, there is a long series of epitaphs for the Drews, the one on the end of their altar-tomb being as follows:—

Dame Agnes Frankland,
 Relict of
 Sir Charles Henry Frankland, Bart.,
 and late wife of
 John Drew,
 died April 23, 1783,
 Aged 55 years.

Ruhamah Pedrick, daughter of Richard and Jean Merritt Pedrick, Married The Nephew of her Uncles by Marriage, John and Richard Pierce

Sir Charles Henry Frankland,
 Baronet: Or, Boston in the Colonial Times
 By Elias Nason

Lady Frankland's youngest brother, Isaac Surriage, for whom she entertained during life the tenderest regard, married Ruhamah Pedrick of Marblehead, Sept. 5, 1768, and having followed the sea for many years, at length settled in Hopkinton where he purchased a farm of 67 acres of John Parker, April 22, 1794, and where he died in Sept. 1813.¹ He left one daughter, Jennie, who was born in Marblehead, January 27, 1773. She was a great favorite of her aunt Frankland, whom she is said to have closely resembled in person, and with whom she spent many of her early days.

She was married to Mr. Pelatiah Bixby of Hopkinton, by whom she had Mary Swain, Edward Surriage, Hannah Webster, John Adams, Simpson, Susan A., Isaac Surriage, Caroline Agnes Frankland, and Charles P., and died Jan. 23, 1839.

Advertisements.

These are to give Notice, That on the fifteenth and sixteenth Days of June 1722. the following Persons were taken at Port Rosaway in Nova Scotia by a Pirate Briganteen one Low Commander, viz: Nicholas Merit tertius, Joseph Libby, Philip Ashton, and Lawrence Fabens, all Fishermen of Marblehead in New-England, whom the said Low Forced and compelled against their Wills from on board their respective Fishing Vellels to serve on board his said Briganteen.

Advertisements.

Province of the Massachusetts } Anno Regni Regis GEORGIJ,
Bay in New-England, Essex, &c } nunc Magna Britannia, &c. Octavo.

THE Deponents of Thomas Trefry late Master of the Schooner Mary; Robert Gilford Master of the Shallop Elizabeth and John Collyer, one of the Crew belonging to the Schooner Samuel, William Nichols Master, all of Marblehead in the County of Essex, Fishermen, Testify and say, That as they were upon their lawfull Implyment nigh Cape Sables, on or about the 14th, 15th and 16th Days of June last past, they were taken Prisoners by Capt. Edward Low a Pirate then Commander of the Brigantine — but since removed himself into the before named Schooner Mary, which they took from the Deponent Trefry; and besides these Deponents they took several other Fishing Vessels, viz. Nicholas Meritt Master of the Shallop Jane, Phillip Ashton Master of the Schooner Milton, Joseph Libbey one of the said Ashton's Crew, Lawrence Phabens one of the Crew belonging to the Schooner Rebeckah, Thomas Salter Commander, all these four Men, to wit, Nicholas Merritt, Phillip Ashton, Joseph Libbey, and Lawrence Phabens, being Young Nimble Men of about Twenty Years of Age, the Pirates kept them by force and would not let them go tho' they pleaded as much as they dare to, yet nothing would avail, so as they wept like Children; yet notwithstanding they forceably Carried them away to the great Grief and Sorrow of the afore named four Young Men, as well as these Deponents; and when any of these Deponents mentioned any thing in favour of the said four Young Men, the Quarter Master of the Pirate Publickly Declared, They would carry them, and let them send to New-England and Publish it if they pleased. These Deponents further say, That the said Pirates Constrained four more Fishermen belonging to Piscataqua, and the Isle of Shoals to go with them against their wills also.

Salem, July the 3d 1722.

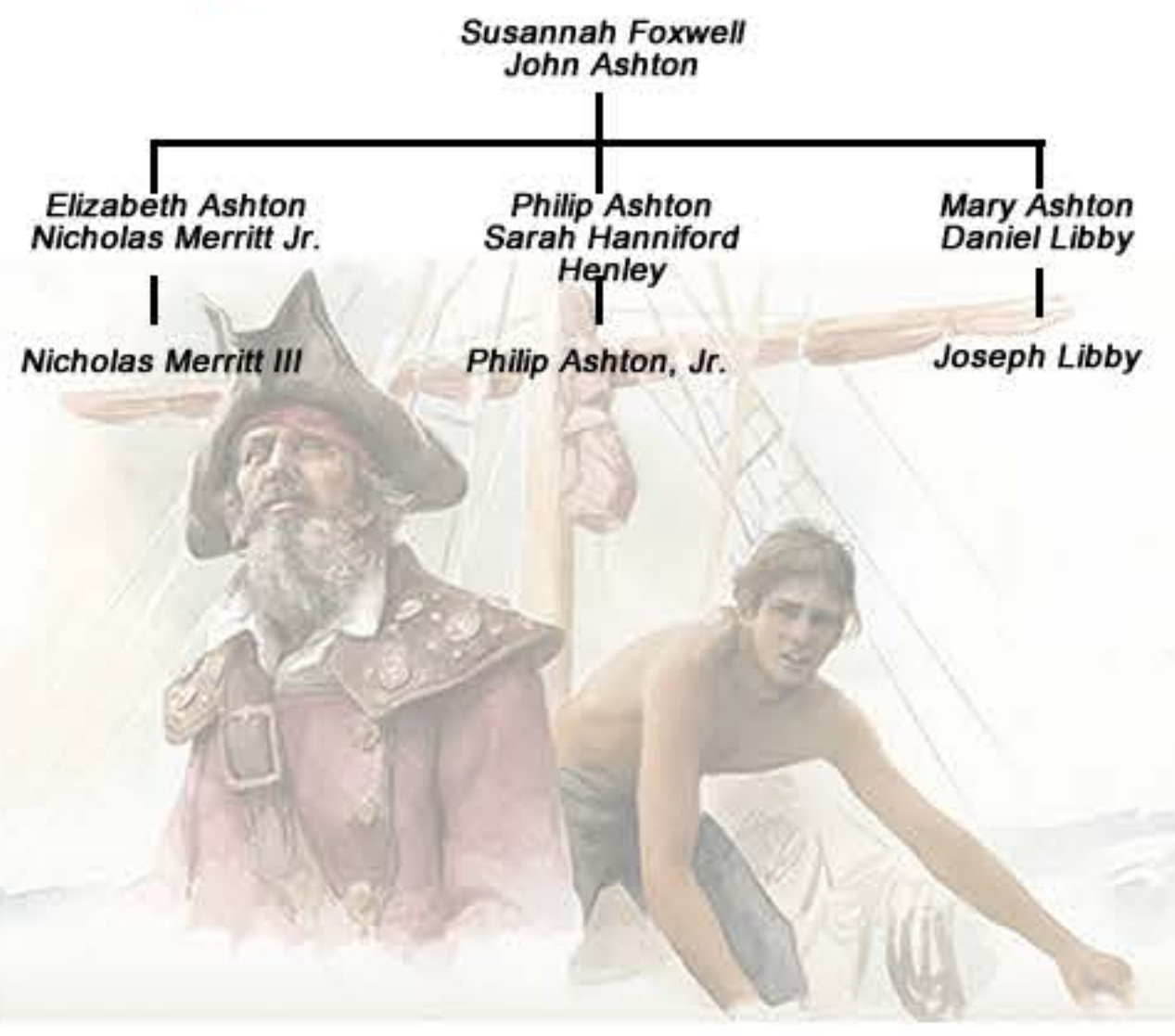
Thomas Trefry,
Robert Collyer,
John Gilford,
Essex, &c. Salem, July the 3d, 1722.

Then Thomas Trefry, John Collyer and Robert Gilford the Three Deponants above named personally Appearing made Oath to the Truth of the foregoing Deposition taken ad Perpetuam rei memoriam.

Coram Nobis } Josiah Wolcott } Justices of the Peace.
Stephen Sewall } Quorum Unus.

A True Copy of the Original, and as of Record appears,
Exam'd per Stephen Sewall, Regist.

The Relationship of the Three Cousins Who Were Kidnapped



At the Point of a Cutlass: The Pirate Capture, Bold Escape, and Lonely Exile ...

By Gregory N. Flemming

Low left the Azores with a larger and faster vessel, the Portuguese pink he called the *Rose*, but that capture would come back to haunt another of the fishermen taken captive, Ashton's cousin Nicholas Merritt. At the time, the thought never occurred to Merritt, who didn't expect he would soon be back to the Azores and, like Ashton, was trying his best to keep out of the way of the pirates. At some point Merritt had gotten on the wrong side of an older, temperamental pirate called Jacob and had become the target of frequent beatings. Merritt hid from Jacob as much as he could, but there was little else he could do. Meanwhile, the pirates continued on their circular route across the Atlantic. Leaving the Azores, the crew sailed in a southeasterly direction for the Canary Islands, which lie just over a hundred miles off the northern edge of Africa. Since they were now running low on water, the pirates sailed into the channel between Tenerife and Grand Canary, where they met up with a fishing boat and forced it to lead them into a port on Tenerife where they could resupply with water. By the first of September 1722, the fleet had sailed still further south and was approaching the Cape Verde Islands, a cluster of ten islands situated three to four hundred miles off the western coast of Africa. But the old pirate Jacob continued to whip Merritt aboard the schooner. The young fisherman desperately wanted to get off the vessel. One day when several other crewmen were going over to the pink, Merritt pleaded with them to tell Low about how much he was "beat and abused" by the old pirate Jacob.¹⁶

About this same time, the pirates were near at the Isle of Maio, one of the southernmost of the Cape Verde Islands, when they encountered and captured the sloop *Thomas and James*, from Bristol, under the command of James Peare. Low kept the sloop, increasing the size of his fleet to three vessels. Apparently sympathetic to Merritt's complaints about his treatment by Jacob, Low moved Merritt over to the newly captured sloop along with nine other men. Most of the other men Low put on the sloop with Merritt were also forced captives, including a Portuguese sailor who had been taken in the capture of the pink at the Azores. Through brief, hushed conversations, Merritt soon learned a number of the other captives aboard the sloop also wanted to escape. The men quickly put a plan in place.

The chance came in the early hours, "a little after break of day," on Thursday, September 5. The three vessels in Low's fleet were sailing in a northerly direction, heading from Maio toward another of the Cape Verde Islands, Boa Vista. The distance between the schooner, the pink, and the sloop gave the men aboard the sloop the chance they were looking for. Three of the captives positioned themselves at the bow of the *Thomas and James* and another three near the stern. The leader of the plot, a large man named John Rhodes, stepped into the cabin, grabbed several pistols, and stood in the cabin door and told the other four men on the sloop about their plan to desert the pirates. They were going to sail the sloop away from Low's ships that day. Anyone who wanted to join them was welcome, Rhodes told the group, "but if any man attempted to make resistance, he swore he would shoot down the first man that stirred." Nobody spoke up against the plan. "There being five of us that wanted to gain our libertv. he was sure of us: and as for the other four they saw plainly it was in vain for them to attempt to oppose us," Merritt recalled.

Setting a course away from the pink and the schooner—Merritt said "we hailed close upon a wind and staid away"—the men aboard the sloop were able to slip away, and the pirates either did not notice or chose not to come after them. Out on their own now, the captives initially planned to set out for England, a trip of some 2,500 miles to the north, but the men had barely enough water to survive for more than a few weeks, and what little water they did have aboard was barely drinkable, "very muddy and foul." They had a sufficient supply of bread on board, but only two or three pieces of meat to share among the ten men. The scarcity of water forced the men to ration themselves to a single cup a day for several weeks. Given their short supply of food and water, the men decided that instead of heading for England they should sail back to the Azores, unaware of the dangers awaiting them there.

Relations between the Portuguese on the Azores and the English—particularly any Englishmen believed to be associated with pirates—were tense at best, and often outright hostile. When New England sea captain Richard Tillinghast arrived at the Azores in 1723, he was immediately suspected of being a pirate—and his vessel was fired upon several times as it came into the harbor. Tillinghast was forced to lower his sails and row ashore with several other men. There, he was questioned by Portuguese authorities and put into jail while his vessel was searched. The captain's chest of papers was hauled ashore and its contents inspected, and the letters he had on board were torn open. Finally, the Portuguese determined that Tillinghast was not a pirate and they let him go free.¹⁷

Much of Tillinghast's misfortune was caused by the pirate Low himself, who would soon return to the Azores and capture more ships, including one shortly before Tillinghast arrived. Low viciously beat some of the men aboard the Portuguese vessels he captured at the Azores, cutting the ears off of several of them. "The Portuguese were greatly enraged against the pirates for abusing their people and taking their vessels," Tillinghast reported after his visit.

So, although Merritt and the other captives probably did not have much choice, the Azores were not the best place for them to land. On September 26, they arrived at Saint Michael, a "rugged and mountainous" island, a long, bow-shaped strip of hilly land that stretches for about forty miles end to end. At many points along the island's shore, the steep hills rise directly from the water's edge. It had been twenty-one days since Merritt and the others had escaped from Low, and only a month or two after Low's first stop and capture of the pink at the Azores. At first there was no sign of trouble. Several of the men went ashore and met up with a consul, a magistrate, and several other officers, who returned to the sloop to inspect the vessel and listen

to the crew's story. The captives were told they would be welcomed and safe on Saint Michael. "The consul told us there should not a hair of our heads be hurt," Merritt recalled. Going ashore, the crew was questioned by a Portuguese officer, the governor. Through an interpreter, the men made their case and apparently were cleared of any suspicion. But a more senior Portuguese officer, a "crusidore" who apparently had jurisdiction over all of the Azores islands, refused to clear the men and instead ordered Merritt and the others into jail.¹⁸

The next day, the argument between the governor and the *crusidore* over the fate of the nine sailors continued. The *crusidore* brought forth several of the Portuguese men who had been aboard the pink when Low captured it and who may have been anxious to take revenge on Merritt and his companions—though Merritt suggests the Portuguese did not go so far as to testify that the men actively participated in the attacks. "They brought several witnesses Portuguese against us, as that we had taken them and had personally been active in the capture and abuse of them, which yet they agreed not in; and only they generally agreed that they heard some of us curse the Virgin Mary, upon which the *crusidore* would have condemned us all for pirates," Merritt wrote.

In the captives' defense, the governor argued that the fact that the men had risked their lives by sneaking away from Low, despite having little food and water aboard, was proof that they were not pirates and should be freed. But those arguments did not help. It seemed to Merritt that the Portuguese sailor who had been aboard the sloop with them had inflamed the official's anger and that there was to be no forgiveness. The men were put in jail, and Merritt worried for days that he would be hanged as a pirate. Barely a month after successfully escaping from Low, Merritt and his companions were now captives again, passing day after day in a cramped and dirty prison cell on a Portuguese island in the middle of the Atlantic.

Merritt spent four months in a stone cell in what he calls the "castle" on Saint Michael, his condition gradually worsening. At first the prisoners had a "tolerable allowance, of such as it was, for our subsistence," but after three months their rations were cut back to a single bowl of cabbage and bread soup each day. Merritt still had occasional contact with the governor who had come to his defense, and the officer continued to urge the *crusidore* to release the men. Eventually, Merritt and three others were moved to another prison on Saint Michael, joining the rest of their former shipmates.

As the days passed, Merritt's condition grew worse. Sometime after he was moved to the new prison, in late March or early April, he contracted smallpox, which at the time was widespread and often fatal. Merritt was forced to spend day and night in his prison cell, battling a high fever with his skin broken out in small red bumps. The conditions in prison were hardly suitable for recovery, and what little food and water he had available to him could not have helped. "In about five or six days the pock began to turn on me and then it made me very sick, and at times I was something out of my mind; and having no tender or wacher, I got up in the night to the pail of water to drink, which at another time, and in another place, would have been thought fatal to me," Merritt wrote.

The consul who had befriended Merritt and his companions when they had first arrived at Saint Michael sent him several bundles of straw to use as a bed, so that he didn't have to lie on the hard prison floor. Even the Portuguese who were guarding Merritt took pity on him. "I could see," he recalled, "how they stared upon me, looked sad, and shook their heads, which told me their apprehensions, that I was a dead man." His guards gave him some brandy and wine, believing the alcohol might help drive out the smallpox.

Merritt survived his battle with smallpox, however, and eventually recovered. He spent several more months in jail until the Portuguese released him in June 1723, a year after he was taken captive by Low off Nova Scotia. The friendly consul took Merritt into his house and provided him with his first decent work and board in many months. Several weeks later, near the end of June, Merritt secured passage with an Irish captain, John Welch, who was bound for Lisbon. When the ship arrived in Portugal three weeks later, Welch initially threatened not to release Merritt until he earned enough money to pay for his passage over, but Merritt was able to earn his freedom by working for several months unloading cargo from Welch's ship.

Merritt finally secured work aboard another ship from Lisbon bound for Boston. The vessel arrived in Boston on September 25 and Merritt arrived safely back home in Marblehead three days later. His homecoming was a tremendous relief, ending what was almost certainly the most tumultuous year of his life. Yet standing at the doorstep of his father's home and looking out toward the familiar water of Marblehead harbor, Merritt could never have guessed the fate of his cousin, Philip Ashton.

The Pirates of the New England Coast, 1630-1730
George Francis Dow, John Henry Edmonds
Courier Corporation, 1996 - History - 394 pages

* Among the thirteen vessels taken were that from Marblehead, viz.: — schooner Milton, Philip Ashton, master; shallop Jane, Nicholas Merritt, master; schooner Rebeckah, Thomas Salter, master; schooner Mary, Thomas Trefry, master; shallop Elizabeth, Robert Gifford, master; schooner Samuel, William Nichols, master.



Prologue
July 19, 1723

Exactly one week before he died, Joseph Libbey stood in court and pleaded his innocence. Libbey had shown the judges a year-old copy of the *Boston News-Letter*, from July 1722, that contained depositions by the captains of three fishing vessels. Those statements, sworn under oath, attested that Libbey was the captain. But over past thirteen months, Joseph Libbey had made enough mistakes for the witnesses who testified in court to claim he was in fact guilty of being an active member of a pirate crew that had been terrorizing the Atlantic coast. Libbey fired guns during the pirates' attacks on other ships, the witnesses said. He was a "stirring, active man among them" and had been seen going aboard captured vessels in search of plunder.

The gallows was erected on the long, narrow bar of sand and rock that formed Gravelly Point, at the edge of the harbor in Newport, Rhode Island. A large crowd of people had come to watch the condemned men die—not only Libbey, but twenty-five others accused of being pirates. Libbey was one of the youngest of the men, just twenty-one or twenty-two years old that summer. Before his capture he had been a fisherman from the small village of Marblehead, Massachusetts, where he had grown up. Like a few of the other men who stood with him at the gallows, Libbey claimed he was the victim of cruel circumstances. He had not chosen to sail with the pirates; he and many of the others had, in one captive's words, gone with "the greatest reluctance and horror of mind and conscience." In time, however, Joseph Libbey must have given in to the crew's brutality—the threats, whippings, and beatings—and began helping out when the pirates attacked other vessels at sea.