

From England to Boston

**A Biographical Sketch of
Robert Walker (1607-1687)**

&

Sarah Leager Walker (1612-1695)

by

Brett Clyde Walker

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For Kristin. First joining, then becoming

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Introduction

"A nation which does not remember what it was yesterday, does not know what it is today, nor what it is trying to do. We are trying to do a futile thing if we do not know where we came from or what we have been about."¹

When I set out to write this, I had planned to write only a few short paragraphs about my ancestors for two reasons. One, I thought that very little detail would be available to me; and two, I believed that, with the exception of a few of them, most led fairly plain lives which would take only a few lines to describe. I planned to use it as an introduction to my personal life history, explaining where I had come from and how my family came to live in Idaho.

As I got started, however, it turned into a much bigger project, one of weaving multiple histories together. Interestingly enough, the written histories that I drew from were largely unpublished one- or two-page photocopies that had been provided by my mother, who had diligently collected them from others. I next turned to a small set of self- or family-published histories, some of which were the tips of great icebergs in the references that they listed and other historical clues that they provided. Finally, to provide context and also check facts, I relied on histories written by historians, which actually were filled with direct mentions of Robert and Sarah and many allusions to them as well.

Now I am inclined to go further. I want to see the places where they lived, where they struggled and thrived, and where children were born and old folks died. I'm inclined to read further about the events of the day to better understand what they experienced.

Recently, I visited Boston on business, hoping to spend any extra time visiting the places discussed in this book. To my chagrin, my schedule kept me car-bound, racing from meeting to meeting. A beautiful coincidence, however, forced my course past King's Chapel Burial Ground, around the Boston Common, past the Old North Church, and to a stop light which stayed red long enough for me to study the façade of the Old South Church.

I reviewed in my mind a list of questions that still linger. Who really was Robert's father? When did Robert meet Sarah? What was their courtship like? What persuaded them to immigrate to the New World? Just how well did Robert know the judge that presided over the Salem witchcraft trials? And, moreover, what about all of the surnames besides Walker that rush together in this great family tree?

Well, I feel more informed than ever. Certain myths I heard as a child have reaffirmed themselves as reality, while certainly new realities have arisen to both alter myth and make men and women just that, men and women. My heart is filled with pride as I reflect on the lives of my ancestors. Never once have I been inclined to dip my head in embarrassment but only in reverent thanksgiving for those who came before, what they did, and how I feel a bit of them in me. It all rolls together well, and what is left is me. I hope I leave a history as compelling.

¹ Wilson, p. 12

Chapter 1

The Memory of Time

Historie is the memorie of time, the life of the dead, and the happinesse of the lyvinge.
-- Captain John Smith²

So little has been written of Robert and Sarah Walker. In brief, their lives were as follows:

- 1606/7 Robert Walker born in Manchester, Lancashire, England
- 1612 Sarah Leager born
- 1623 Robert began an apprenticeship as a linen weaver
- 1629 Robert completed his apprenticeship and married Sarah Leager in England
- 1630 They joined the Puritan fleet led by John Winthrop and sail to America, landing in Salem, Massachusetts
- 1631 They moved to Boston
- 1632 Robert became 131st member of the First Church in Boston
- 1634 Robert became a freeman
- 1669 Robert co-founded the Third Church in Boston (Old South Church)—Sarah is listed as a co-founder
- 1687 Robert died of a stroke at age 80 in Boston, Massachusetts
- 1695 Sarah died at 83 in Boston, Massachusetts

Despite these brief details normally available in genealogies, Robert and Sarah were unique people, people worth knowing better. These were people who, when bits and pieces of history are pulled together, are surrounded by detail that confirms lives of good filled with contributions of lasting quality.

Robert Walker was a unique man, one filled with enthusiasm for life and a clear idea of what he wanted out of it. Having been left at a young age with little if any family to rely on, Robert was ambitious and self-reliant. His mother had died either during childbirth or when he was but a child (either in 1606 or 1609). Any attempts to replace her with another were foiled by death as well. And Robert's father died at some point prior to or in 1623, leaving him motherless and fatherless at the age of 16.

Sarah was equally unique, a hard-working woman of many skills, educated, well respected by many around her, and a mother of many children.

Robert's circumstances must have engendered in him a wanderlust of sorts—nothing to keep him in Manchester, no family, a livelihood that was one of the better professions at the time in England, and a big country before him to explore and make his own. He apprenticed as a linen

² Lamson, i

weaver in a town rich with lavender.³ Robert had gone to work at a young age, with little if any education, as a linen weaver, which was probably the profession of his father.

At some point in time, Robert made his way to London—assumedly upon hearing of a fleet leaving for the New World. And sometime before he left Manchester or elsewhere along the way, he was married.

But how did he hear about the colonists who would brave a 50% chance of death to settle a New World? Did he feel that he would be an exception to the rule or was he willing to chance it all based on how little there was left for him in England? Perhaps there were other circumstances that compelled him to leave

³ In a statement made two days before his death, Robert Walker had conversed with a good friend. “He told me there was plenty of Lavander in the Town where he was Prentice [apprenticed].” (Thomas, p. 141)

Chapter 2

Robert Walker's Lineage

Currently, the Walker line is traced easily to Robert Walker as the first Walker to leave England and immigrate to the New World. Beyond Robert, the family history gets difficult. But to that point, a rich backdrop exists— one that is filled with color and variety against which we can stretch ourselves and see a little clearer into the past.

In family and church records alike, a Mr. Walker is mentioned, living in the 1500s, the earliest dated Walker ancestor on record. Little is known about where he came from, how he lived, and so on.⁴

It is known that this Mr. Walker of the parish of Manchester had two sons and a daughter (along with the only dates known about them):

- Thomas, of Higher Ardwick, buried February 26, 1611/12
- Robert, of Droylsden, buried December 30, 1623
- Anne Walker, married August 3, 1597 (to Robert Harrison, a linen webster), buried January 17, 1644/5

To each of these brothers was born a son named Robert, one traced with church records and the other via a last will and testament. But only one is the Robert Walker that settled in



Manchester Districts (Thomson, p. 58)

⁴ Several references to "Scotch" are made through the life sketches of family members. Lucy Walker (seven generations later and daughter of John Walker) said that when told about her religion's intent to practice polygamy, it "aroused every drop of scotch in my veins." Lucy also recorded that her great grandfather Timothy had come from Scotland, even though the records show that he was born in America. It was said that Solomon Walker's (also a son of John) "conservative nature was from his Scotch ancestors, and often 'Sol Walker' became the Scotchman in his friend's jokes. But the kind of man he became was due more to his childhood environment than his Scotch ancestors." (Walker, p. 23)

Boston in the year 1630 (hereafter referred to as “Robert of Boston” to avoid confusion. Church records show a son was born in about 1607 in Manchester, Lancashire, England—born to Thomas of Higher Ardwick. Later in his life, after moving to America, Robert of Boston signed affidavits⁵ claiming the following facts, which are essential to this research:

1. That he was a “Linnen webster” (which was a trade usually passed from father to son)
2. That he was about 72 years of age (putting his birth year at around 1607)
3. That he was “about 56 years since, living with his father in the town of Manchester in Lancashire within the Realme of England”⁶ (or that he lived with his father until he was 16, putting the year at 1623—which is the year Robert of Droylsden died, Thomas having died in 1610 or 1611—also likely the year he began his apprenticeship)

Because he was a member of the yeoman class, he would have stayed near his birthplace until at least the age of 16 based on the limited mobility of the class⁷--an age when many young men entered into apprenticeships, that of a linen weaver lasting six to seven years.

So just which man is Robert of Boston’s father? Here are two reasonable scenarios that outline this.

Father Scenario #1: Thomas Walker of Higher Ardwick

Little is known of Thomas Walker except that which can be gleaned from church records. Thomas married Margaret Bardsley about 1600, and they had the following children:

- Thomas, baptized April 19, 1601
- Elizabeth, baptized January 16, 1602/3, buried May 22, 1604
- Margaret, baptized January 27, 1604/5
- John, baptized November 23, 1606, buried April 7, 1608
- Robert, baptized February 21, 1607/8
- John, baptized February 11, 1609/10

Between the years 1587 and 1630, there was only one Robert Walker baptized at Manchester Parish Church (now called Cathedral Church). Church records state that this Robert was the son of Thomas of Higher Ardwick, and that he was baptized in the church on February 21, 1607/8. It is possibly that Robert was born a few days or as many as a few weeks prior to his baptismal date, although it was customary to baptize infants within a few days of birth.

Thomas’ wife Margaret died in February of 1609 shortly after the baptism of their next and youngest son John, when Robert was less than two years old. Two years later, Thomas married a woman named Cicely (in early 1611), and shortly after he died in and was buried at Manchester on February 26, 1611/2.

In Thomas’ last will and testament, he left clear instructions for the care of his children. All were to be under the care of Cicely (spelled in the will “Cycalie”) until they turned 21 years of age, or in the event of marriage or poor behavior be turned over to his brother-in-law Robert Harrison (Anne’s husband). Cicely took charge of the children, all of whom were very young. In

⁵ Banks, p. 95 states that he was born in 1601 and deposed in 1679 at the age of 78. Yet another book states that he was deposed in 1679 at the age of 72, which would place his birth in 1607 (Walker, p. 1). Still another deposition made on June 10, 1684 indicates one “Robert Walker, about 78,” which would place his birth in 1606 (Thwing, p. 224-225).

⁶ *New England Historical*, vol. 7 p. 46 (signed on April 10, 1679)

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 59

1614 Cicely married a man named Robert Buersell (also Percivall) and Thomas' four children likely lived with him. Thomas' will would have been nullified by Cicely's remarriage, but no mention is made of that. Robert, being only seven at the time, may have remembered this man as his father.

Most genealogists have concluded that Thomas of Higher Ardwick is the father of Robert Walker. However, Robert of Boston claimed late in his life that he lived with his father until 1623 ("about 56 years since, living with his father in the town of Manchester in Lancashire within the Realme of England"⁸). However, Thomas died in 1611, which leaves two possible explanations for Robert of Boston's statement.

1. That he lived at the "home" of his father until 1623. This could be based on Cicely's death, which occurred October 5, 1623. It is possible that Cicely and her second husband Robert remained in Thomas' home. If so, Robert could have lived with his stepmother and step-step-father until her death. If so, upon Cicely's death and she being the sole executor of Thomas' will, it may have become difficult for Robert to remain at home. No death information is available for Cicely's second husband, Robert Buersell. Robert's departure from his father's home may have been due to his entering an apprenticeship.
2. Or, someone else was Robert of Boston's father.

Father Scenario #2: Robert Walker of Droylsden, brother to Thomas

A second scenario is based on another simple clue: Thomas of Higher Ardwick's will. As mentioned, Thomas had a brother Robert, then living in the parish of Droylsden. Thomas named Robert of Droylsden as an overseer and witness to his will, which took effect when Thomas was buried on February 26, 1611/2. This Robert of Droylsden may have been Robert of Boston's father.

In a review Thomas of Higher Ardwick's last will and testament (dated February 20, 1611/2), Thomas gave a third of his estate to his four surviving children, Thomas, Margaret, Robert, and John, and a soon-to-be-born child (who would be named Michael, the son of Cicely). He left another third of his estate to his second wife Cicely, and the final third he left to himself for the repayment of debts. After funeral expenses, any remainder was to be divided among his two youngest children (Robert and John) and "that which is ventre-la-mere"⁹ (meaning "in the womb"), his son Michael that was born only a few days after Thomas's death (baptized March 1, 1611/2).

But here's the clue that causes any theory of Robert of Boston's patriarchy to sway. In his will, Thomas gave "to Rob'te Walker some of my brother Rob'te Walker [and] my godson"¹⁰ a small sum of money. Could it be that this Robert is possibly the same person as Robert of Boston?

Few records of Robert of Droylsden and no records of his son Robert Walker are available. Of those available¹¹, Robert of Droylsden married Alice (no known surname and no known marriage date), who died on December 10, 1606. According to church records, Robert and Alice had three children:

- Elizabeth, buried December 19, 1602

⁸ *New England Historical*, vol. 7 p. 46

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 60

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64

- Anne, buried January 31, 1603/4
- Alice, baptized July 7, 1604, buried February 11, 1605/6

Unfortunately, Robert of Droyslden's three daughters all died at young ages and his wife Alice died December 10, 1606. These deaths may have been caused by an outbreak of the plague in 1603, where almost one-fifth of the population of Manchester was wiped out.¹²

No son is mentioned in church records. But Thomas of Higher Ardwick's will clearly points out that his brother Robert of Droyslden had a son, who in fact was Thomas' godson.¹³ This son Robert would have necessarily been born prior to 1602 (making him older than the three daughters¹⁴) or after 1604 (daughter Alice's birth).

That Robert of Droyslden's wife Alice died December 10, 1606 and that his brother Thomas died in 1611 creates a small window in history for the birth and baptism of a son named Robert in late February of 1607.

Here is the logic:

1. No other children could have been born to Robert of Droyslden between 1606 and 1610, since Alice died at the end of 1606 and Robert didn't remarry Katherine Percival (his second wife) until July 25, 1608, but she died and was buried March 27, 1609. He married a third time before August of 1612.
2. However, by 1611 (the year of Thomas of Higher Ardwick's will), Robert of Droyslden clearly had a son, also Thomas' godson, who would have necessarily been born prior to Alice's death on December 10, 1606.
3. Under these circumstances, Robert of Boston's baptism may have been delayed by a few weeks with the possible scenarios:
 - If his mother was Alice who died on December 10, 1606, she may have died due to complications while giving birth to Robert of Boston.
 - That Robert of Boston was born on or before December 10, 1606 but baptized February 21, 1607 due to delays caused by his mother's death, a nervous and confused father (who at that point had no living descendants but this newborn son), winter setting in, and so on.
 - That church records mistakenly list Robert as Thomas' son, when Thomas may have only been acting in proxy for Robert his brother.

The most compelling fact that makes Robert of Droyslden a prime candidate to be Robert of Boston's father is that Robert of Droyslden died on December 30, 1623—the year that Robert of Boston said he stopped living in his father's home. Such a date would likely stick out in a person's mind even in their very old age.

What would have to become clear to prove this view is the following:

1. The dates of Robert of Boston's declarations place his birth around 1607 when his mother may have died December 10, 1606?¹⁵

¹² Thomson, p. 99

¹³ Thomas' will also mentions a goddaughter, Margaret (daughter of James Buardsell [or Bardsley], his wife Margaret's brother)—her genealogy is traceable, leading to the conclusion that the mention of a godson is no error.

¹⁴ Banks, p. 95 indicates that Robert of Boston was born in 1601

¹⁵ With one exception: The deposition made on June 10, 1684 indicates one "Robert Walker, about 78," which would place his birth in 1606 (see Thwing, p. 224-225). However, if his father were Robert of Droyslden, then Robert of Boston would have been 77 at the time, his birthday not occurring until late in the year.

2. If his father was not Robert of Droylsden, why would Robert of Boston have referred to that man he lived with in Manchester as “father”? Would not the passing years (56 total since the date he last lived with his father) have shaped his description and made it more accurate? If, however, arrangements were made for Robert of Boston to live with his Uncle Thomas until he was four (Thomas died in 1611), would he have then lived with his stepmother Cicely and his step-step-father? Would he ever have referred to this man as “father?” Did he ever return to live with Robert of Droylsden and if so, when?

Only time and additional records will bear out which man is really Robert of Boston’s father.

Regardless of who his father might have been, Robert was left fatherless sometime before the age of 16 (by 1623). His younger years were filled with play and possible attendance at grammar school—a common practice at the time. At the age of 16 most young men were bound to a tradesman for an apprenticeship. In Robert’s case, he was likely bound over to someone for a period of up to seven years to learn the family trade, linen weaving.¹⁶

¹⁶ Thomson, p. 107

Chapter 3

Life in Manchester, Lancashire

Historical Backdrop

The early 1600s were the beginning of Age of Enlightenment, a period historically known as the Baroque World. Key events of that time include:

- The *Authorized Version* of the Bible by King James I was published (1611).
- William Shakespeare had only recently died (1616).
- Cervantes wrote *Don Quixote* (1605-1615).
- Holland and Flanders were given their independence from Spain (1609), which led to the earliest Puritan movement and the Pilgrims who formed the first permanent settlement in Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620.
- Paintings were made by masters such as El Greco (1600), Carvaggio (1602), Rubens (1617), Bernini (1623), Van Dyck (1625), Rembrandt (1642).
- Galileo (1632), Descartes (1637), Locke (1650), Pascal (1650), Spinoza (1650), and Hobbes (1651) were busy altering people's views of science.
- Opera had been born in Florence, Italy just a few years earlier.¹⁷

Industry

The Walkers lived at a time of great change in England. In the early 1600s, farming was the primary industry in England. Rent for land had risen almost six times in less than a hundred years from one shilling and fourpence to six shillings an acre. The value of crops had also gone up substantially.

This was a family of linen weavers—a trade handed down from father to son. Linens in their broadest sense were becoming the lifeblood of English foreign trade—which was primarily based on the export of English wool. With the influx of Flemings (immigrants from northern Belgium), people had begun to weave wool at home—giving birth to the notion of “cottage industry.” Coventry had become famous for “true blue” wool. Manchester had just begun to attract attention to its cottons. Other towns were well known for green cloth, baize, serge, and bombazine. In London, felt hats were made, while in other parts of England immigrants from other lands made lace. It was a good time for a linen weaver to be alive, with plenty of demand for one's output.

There were still no factories, and as all of this labor occurred at the family level, no man could legally have more than two looms. Other major manufacturing developments raced across England, such as curing herrings, lead and tin smelting, coal mining, and brass making. The queen with monopolies and royal grants controlled all trade. Prices were often fixed—the queen taxed everything from which money could be squeezed at the highest level possible. Heavy rules were placed on every trade. For instance, in 1566, the Queen of England ordered that “No person shall sell in Lancashire or carry out of that county any kind of cloths, cottons, friezes, or rugs made within that county to be sold, before the owner or make shall put to the same a seal of lead

¹⁷ Cunningham, p. 348-349

bearing his mark engraved on one side and the true length of every cloth &c engraved on the other side of the seal.” Weights and measures governed nearly every aspect of life.

Liverpool, a port city near Manchester, had fewer than 1,000 citizens, whereas Manchester had five to six thousand (today, it has over 440,000). Towns were divided into parishes, where people could turn to each other for safety, security, and entertainment.

Lifestyle

The Walkers ate two meals a day, being middle class, they usually ate bacon, souse (pickled pork trimmings or fish), brawn (boar meat or headcheese), salted beef or mutton, and pickled herrings. Bread soaked in pot-liquor (the liquid left in a pot after cooking) and meat pies (filled with herrings, pilchards, venison, or eels) were also common foods. The poor usually ate only rye or barley bread.

The world was waking up. Information was being shared more than ever. Newspapers and magazines were born (1622)—pamphlets of news had just begun to appear (1614). The Walkers, like others in England, resorted to games of riddles, jests, merry tales, cards, dice, shuttlecock, and chess to pass the time. Out of doors, they wrestled, pitched the bar, played football, participated in hurling (carrying a weighted ball to a designated place), fished, hawked, and hunted. Occasionally, wandering companies of minstrels and harpers would come through Manchester with their songs and dances. Actors and their simple plays could be seen in public gathering areas.

By 1629, conditions in England were far from ideal. Religious unrest was rampant in eastern England. People were fighting against the Church of England and especially its stranglehold on the government. Many were leaving the Church out of disagreement, calling themselves Separatists or Puritans. A group of emigrants from Holland and northern England had left in 1620 aboard the ship *Mayflower* to successfully establish a colony in the New World at what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts. One writer said,

*The England of the first half of the seventeenth century was not a happy land. It was a nation in the throes of economic, political, and religious upheaval. Its economy was undergoing drastic change from the feudal to the mercantile. Politically the Crown was fighting desperately to retain its feudal prerogatives in the face of growing popular sentiment. In matters of religion the Reformation had struck, and a great mass of Englishmen were no more inclined to look upon the King and his archbishops as the deputies of the Lord than they were the Pope. As usual in times of readjustment, it was not the very rich, nor yet the very poor, who bore the brunt. The rich had the means to weather the storm. The poor did not miss what they had never had. But the sturdy middle class, the small farmers and yeomen and tradesmen felt the full weight of it.*¹⁸

There were numerous special ceremonies and holidays, such as Christmas, New Year's, May Day, Twelfth Day, Plough Monday (the first Monday after Epiphany), Shrove Tide (the time between Ash Wednesday and the preceding Saturday evening), Easter, Whitsuntide (Pentecost), Candlemas Day (February 2nd—in America known as Ground Hog Day), Martinmas (November 11th, the feast of St. Martin), All Hallows' Eve (Halloween), Sheep-shearing, and Church-ale, the annual ale-drinking picnic for the benefit of the Church. The Puritan's resented the way these holidays were developing and the laziness that they seemed to promote.¹⁹

¹⁸ Jennings, p. 11

¹⁹ Dexter, p. 16-18

Chapter 4

An Eventful Year

God sifted an whole nation that He might bring choice grain over into this wilderness.²⁰

1629 was a magical year for Robert. Apprenticed at the age of 16 in 1623, he finished his six to seven years of training by 1629. He was now free to strike out on his own, establishing himself as a linen weaver. He was free to choose a location but would likely stray from the family surroundings of Manchester. He was free to marry and begin a family. He was 23.

In 1629, Robert married Sarah Leager,²¹ daughter of Jacob (or James) and Margaret (Grymwood or Grimwood) Leager, of Hadleigh and Kersey, Suffolk county. Sarah was born around 1612. Whether they met in Manchester or elsewhere is not known.

Up to this point, Robert's lot in life was set. He was a linen weaver, as was his father. He would die in the same conditions that he was born—poor. He would struggle his entire life with low wages and a desire to expand beyond the limitations set by the Queen. Such conditions made men look elsewhere for their livelihood. Around this time, Robert likely began to search for alternatives to the life that his father and his father's father had led—one that he seemed doomed to imitate.

This same year, Robert learned of an opportunity to leave England for America on a ship sponsored by the newly formed Massachusetts Bay Company, as part of John Winthrop's fleet.

While his motivation for leaving England may have been based on religious unrest, only a portion of the first emigrants were actually motivated by this reason. A more substantial motivator was simply the way society worked, the economic conditions of the time, and the social freedoms he lacked.

The majority of these people (in Winthrop's fleet) were of the yeoman class who for generations had been the tenantry of the nobility and landed gentry. They did not live—they simply vegetated, hopeless of any improvement in their condition socially or materially, and doomed to support indefinitely a class of parasites set over them by a monarchial form of government. The Manorial System perpetuated a social slavery whereby landlords drained the earnings of their tenants, whose lives were spent in working for their masters and who died as poor as they begin.²²

If anything, the clergy that preached to people like Robert had told them for years that this was their lot in life, that they should be “patient plodders [of] the doctrine of Christian

²⁰ Hawke, p. 2

²¹ Records about passengers on the Winthrop fleet indicate the following regarding Robert Walker: “Walker, Robert. Boston. From Manchester, England. Linen weaver. Born 1601. Deposed 1679, aged 78 years. Member church, No. 131. Freeman 19 May 1634. Died 29 May 1687. Walker, Sarah. Wife of Robert.” One family history indicates that Robert married Sarah in England (Personal family history documents, “Robert Walker of Boston”), while others claim that he married in 1635, 5 years after coming to America (*The American Genealogist*, vol. 19 p. 195). Based on documents about the Winthrop fleet, I support the view that he married Sarah in before coming to America.

²² Banks, p. 13

resignation and acceptance of the lot in which Providence had placed them.... Only in rare instances could a tenant become a freeholder."²³ To own land, to have social freedom and thereby a sense of spiritual freedom, to profit by one's own labor—these were the freedoms that Robert must have craved. However, to become a "freeholder" or land owner in England in the 1600s was only slightly better than being a tenant, as King Charles had decided to heavily tax these people as well.

Land hunger was therefore impossible to satisfy in England. A depression in the English wool industry was raging.²⁴ Personal freedom was extremely limited. But times were changing. Many had heard of a great continent, the Promised Land, across the Atlantic where a hundred acres would be given to each and every settler, which had been the charter of the Plymouth colonists. Such news spreads quickly by word of mouth. This was almost too good to be true. Few had such opportunities in England.

The Massachusetts Bay Company had been formed in 1629, John Winthrop signing on late as one who would lead a fleet of ships laden with settlers from England, across the Atlantic, and to America. Their destination: the Massachusetts Bay, of course. The process of recruiting passengers was handled primarily by word of mouth, but toward the end, as the lists grew full, some applicants were rejected in favor of people with trades and skills that would be necessary in thriving as a community in the New World.²⁵

On the ships there were more than a thousand colonists separated into four classes:

- 1) Those who paid for their own passage
- 2) Those who had some profession and would be paid for their services in the form of money or land
- 3) Those who paid for part of their passage and would labor once they arrived in America at a specific daily rate until they had fully paid for the trip
- 4) Indentured servants who came at the expense of their masters (landholders in England) and were being sent as servants in exchange for landholdings in America²⁶

Leaving Home

Two recruits on the Winthrop Fleet were Robert and Sarah Walker. They were among six people from Lancashire and 154 people total from Suffolk that decided to sign up to leave England. Robert was young, only 23, and therefore would have less expense than would a large family—just himself and his young wife, who was only 18 at the time of their departure. For the fleet sponsors, the cost of passage was hard to determine, as the length of the voyage was always uncertain—ranging from six to twelve weeks. In this case, the cost for this passage would be "5 li. a person."²⁷ What a great opportunity for a young couple, one equipped with a marketable trade, a zest for life, and a quest for more freedom and privilege than had been afforded to them in England!

Robert and Sarah presumably arrived in London no later than the end of February or early March of 1630.²⁸ The fleet had been assembled at Southampton Water—eleven ships in all. The lead ship was the *Arbella*, followed by others, which would make another journey across the Atlantic. These were ships built as ordinary freighters, normally transporting merchandise from

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Unger, p. 44

²⁵ Ibid. p. 23

²⁶ Ibid., p. 26

²⁷ Banks, p. 26

²⁸ Ibid., p. 33—based on the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Company, the fleet was to be ready to sail on March 1, 1630

On Tuesday, April 6th, Reverend John Cotton, Vicar of Boston, Lincolnshire came and blessed the ships and the undertaking. It is unclear whether he or anyone knew that these emigrants were leaving the old England for the new England, the old Boston for a new one.

While those on board “had their speech strangled from the depth of their inward dolor with heart-breaking sobs...adding many drops of salt liquor to the ebbing ocean,” many people on shore mocked the emigrants as “crack-brains.”³¹ Robert and Sarah must have been overwhelmed at leaving the only land they knew and going to one that promised freedom at a cost that they had no basis to understand. According to one writer,

The character of the emigration created something close to an equal society, unlike anything known then in England or, for that matter, in all of Europe. Old attitudes toward social status remained intact, but in economic terms the distance between the bottom and the top of society was relatively slight. Occasionally, in the early years, gentlemen did cross to America. In Virginia they soon vanished; if they lived through the “seasoning” that killed so many, they sailed home with blistered hands and emaciated bodies, convinced that for all its faults a more benign England offered a better way of life. In New England and the Middle Colonies many stayed and, for the most part, exerted a lasting influence on society and everyday life. Still, the generalization holds that most of the emigrants emerged from England’s middle and lower-middle classes.³²

The *Arbella* and four other ships weighed anchor and leisurely sailed down the Thames toward the English Channel. The rest of the ships in the fleet would not be ready for two to three weeks.³³ Aboard were the following types of people:

- Nobility represented by a daughter of an earl, Lady Arbella Fiennes (whom the ship was named after) and her brother Charles
- A knight, Sir Richard Saltonstall, the sole representative of the titled gentry
- Two esquires
- Four of the “gentleman” class
- 17 who had “Mr.” listed after their names
- 25 heads of families who were of a social rank above that of yeoman or husbandman (of the 247 heads of families aboard)
- The majority of passengers were artisans or tillers of the soil
- 243 adult males, 129 with wives, 13 single women, 135 children, 17 servants
- Tradesmen included an armorer, a baker, a blacksmith, a carpenter, a cooper (barrel maker), a military officer, a physician, three tailors, fisherman, herdsman, two masons, a tanner, and a weaver³⁴

Robert was the weaver. Because no formal record was made of which passengers sailed on which ship, it is difficult to determine which ship Robert and Sarah sailed on. Two others on board were Simon and Anne Bradstreet. Simon would be the colony’s governor in later years and Anne Bradstreet, born the same year as Sarah Walker, would publish the first volume of poetry to originate in America.³⁵

³¹ Ibid., p. 26

³² Hawke, p. 2

³³ Banks, p. 37—no record exists of the remaining ships and their passage until their arrival in New England.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 52

³⁵ Simon attended both Robert’s and Sarah’s funerals and lived nearby. Whether the couples regularly interacted or were just well acquainted is not known. See the latter part of this document for more details.

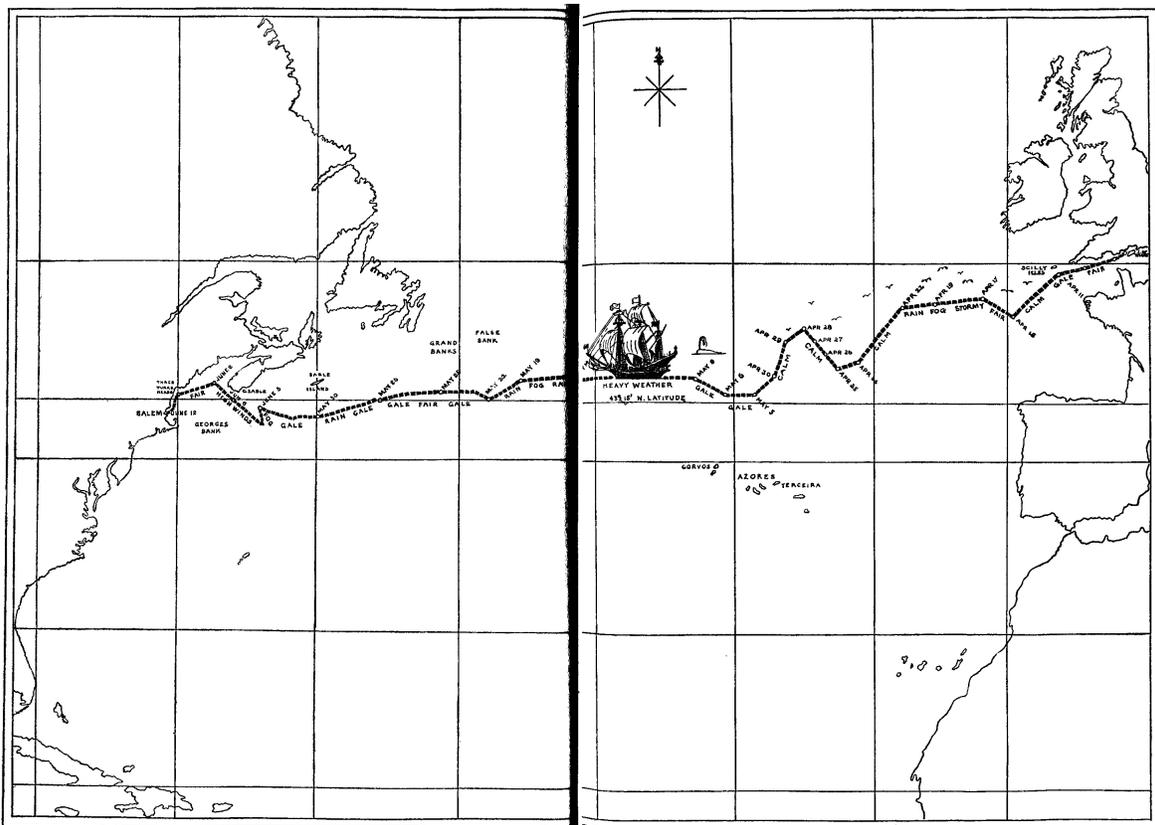
Across the Stormy Atlantic

In the 1600s, ships sailing the oceans were faced with many threats: weather, sickness among passengers, and pirates. Immediately upon leaving England, the decks were cleared for possible action against enemy ships—a common preparation due to hostilities of the day.

In the morning we descried from the top eight sail astern of us...We supposing they might be Dunkirkers, our captain caused the gunroom and gundeck to be cleared; all the hammocks were taken down, our ordnance loaded, and our powder-chests and fireworks made ready, and our landmen quartered among the seamen, and twenty-five of them appointed muskets, and every man written down for his quarter.³⁶

Women and children went below deck to be out of danger. As the ships approached, in fair weather and with a wind from the north, both sides saluted each other, discharged their weapons in friendship, and carried on their way. Still in the English Channel, the journey thus far must have been exciting to all aboard.

On Sunday, May 11, 1630, the first ships of the Winthrop fleet were out of the Channel and into the broad Atlantic with three thousand miles to go. A “very stiff gale” from the northwest hit them, creating choppy seas and seasickness among the passengers. Because the ministers were sick, they omitted religious services on their first Sabbath at sea.³⁷ John Winthrop,



The Journey of the Arbella (Banks, p. x-xi)

³⁶ Ibid., p. 37-38

³⁷ Ibid., p. 40

now Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company, relied on a special method to cure everyone as quickly as possible. He wrote:

*Our children and others, that were sick, and lay groaning in the cabins, we fetched out, and having stretched a rope from the steerage to the mainmast, we made them stand, some of one side and some of the other, and sway it up and down till they were warm, and by this means they soon grew well and merry.*³⁸

The fleet suffered from bad weather throughout May. At one point, storms were so bad that 70 of the 240 cows aboard died from being tossed and bruised so badly.³⁹ Navigation was also difficult—the tools available at the time allowed only for measuring latitude by means of a cross-staff but not longitude. East or west positions were estimated, as was distance traveled.

Those were jobs that someone else worried about. Robert and Sarah likely experienced much of what the other passengers did: seasickness, cramped quarters, a terrible diet. They avoided scurvy (lack of vitamin C) with foods that likely tasted badly. A few deaths were recorded.

A New Shore

After 68 cold and stormy days and nights at sea and on Saturday, June 12, 1630, the first ship landed at Cape Ann, on the rim of the Massachusetts Bay. “Those who were able went ashore and ‘gathered a fine store of strawberries.’ The next day (Sunday), Miasconomo, the Sagamore of Agawam [an Indian chief], came aboard and presumably welcomed the strangers to the home of his forefathers.”⁴⁰

On Wednesday, June 18th, most of the fleet was safely at port near Salem and all disembarked. The Promised Land lay at their feet. According to some, this was a “hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men”⁴¹ which they would now endeavor to make into a home of sorts. The wild men who lurked in the trees were now few, decimated by small pox or chicken pox⁴² introduced by European fishermen years before, a strange way to prepare the land for a sudden influx of settlers. What was yesterday a continent home to fewer than 300 colonists would now quickly become a permanent commonwealth with over a thousand.⁴³

The colonists found a distressing state of affairs in this New England. Eighty of 300 newly arrived colonists at Salem had died after less than a year in New England. The others were sick and nearly out of food and little preparation had been made for the new arrivals. By their mid-June arrival, the New England growing season was well underway. What they found in Salem could not have brought much encouragement. The settlement consisted of fewer than forty homes and only a third of them resembled the homes they had left behind in England. The rest were cave-like dugouts burrowed into hillsides and roofed with wood and thatch, copied from Indian shelters.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 40

³⁹ Ibid., p. 41

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 44

⁴¹ Hawke, p. 12

⁴² Ibid., p. 12

⁴³ Winsor, p. 113

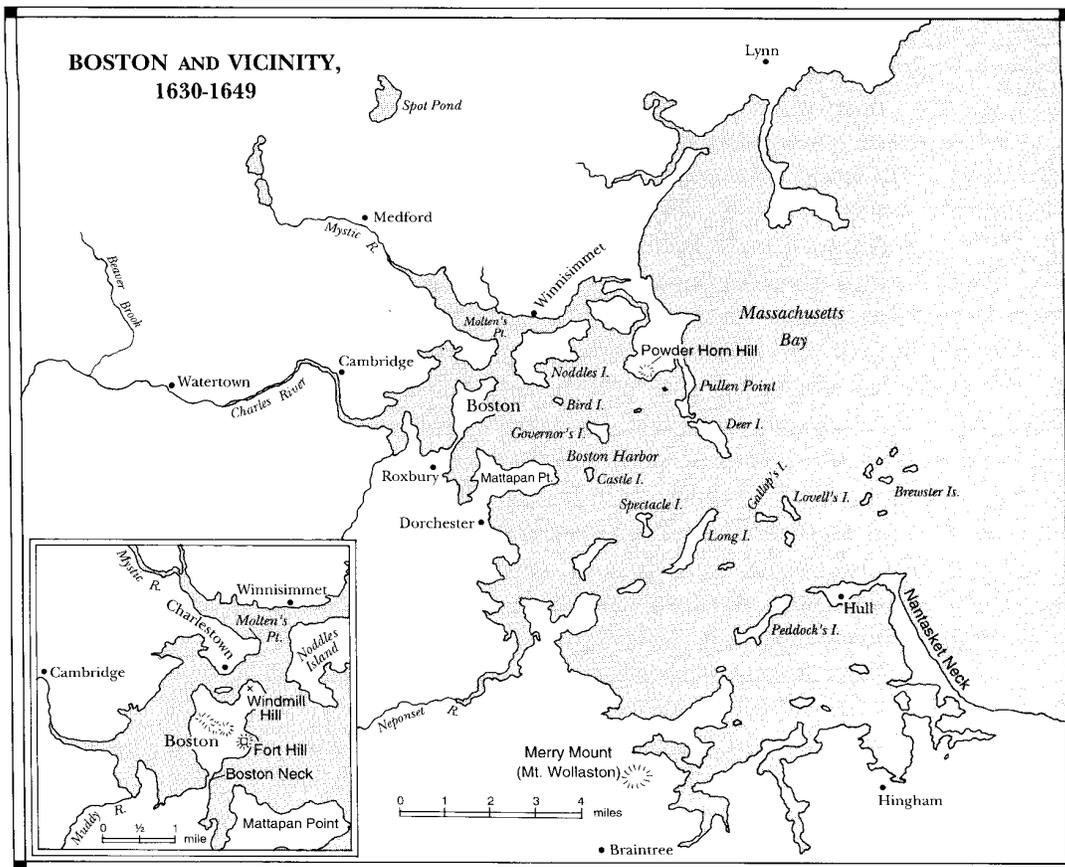
Because the Salem colony could not possibly accommodate the new settlers, John Winthrop had to quickly decide where else to settle, clear fields, and build homes before winter set in.⁴⁴

What thoughts would have crossed Robert and Sarah's minds as they sat upon these shores, their few worldly possessions around them? What would they make of their new life in such an undefined, unestablished land?

⁴⁴ Winthrop, p. 35

Chapter 5 Settling In

While many of the group dispersed to claim land in surrounding areas, it is believed that Robert and Sarah settled with the group for the winter in Charleston.⁴⁵ The Charleston settlement was in contact with others. The Pilgrims that settled Plymouth in 1620, led by William Bradford,



Boston and vicinity (Winthrop, p. 198)

consulted with Governor "Winthrop, and the other leading men at the Bay of Massachusetts recently arrived"⁴⁶ regarding civil affairs.

The Separatists of Plymouth had already lost about half of their small colony of "100 or so"⁴⁷ to sickness. In a letter to Bradford written on July 25, 1630 (only a few weeks after their arrival in New England), Winthrop said that his group was experiencing the same type of loss. He indicated that "the hand of God was upon them with sickness and taking many from amongst them, the righteous suffering with the wicked in these bodily judgments." The Charleston

⁴⁵ Charleston is now part of Boston via annexation. Winsor, p. xxi.

⁴⁶ Bradford, p. 279

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 428

settlers beseeched those of Plymouth and Salem (also recently formed) to join them in a day set apart to pray that the Lord would withdraw his hand and spare the lives of these settlers.

One of the most unique aspects of this company's charter was that it provided for self-government, something that no prior company had been granted by any sovereign. This would allow for virtual independence—that “the whole government [be] legally transferred and established to remain with us and others which shall inhabit upon the said Plantation.”⁴⁸ The Boston area is often referred to as the cradle of liberty, the place where much of the impatience and discontent with foreign meddling would begin.

Only six days later, “self-government” for the Charleston settlers began by way of formally organizing a church. A letter from a reverend at Charleston to Bradford at Plymouth said, “some have entered into church covenant” (meaning joined together to form a new church). The first four were the Governor, Mr. John Winthrop, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Dudley [Anne Bradstreet's father and second governor of the colony], and Mr. Wilson; “since then five more have joined, and others are likely to follow....There are many honest Christians...”⁴⁹ Robert Walker was the 131st person to join this new church, joining in 1632 after moving to Boston.⁵⁰ He may have shared the following feelings:

*I...came into this Country, where I found a new world and new manners, at which my heart rose. But after I was convinced it was the way of God, I submitted to it and joined the church at Boston.*⁵¹

Fortunately these colonists were blessed with good weather their first winter, something that had also occurred when Plymouth was settled just ten years prior. It was “a very mild season—little frost and less snow—but clear serene weather [with] few northwest winds, which was a great mercy to the English coming over so rawly and uncomfortably provided, wanting all utensils and provision which belonged to the well-being of planters.”⁵²

The situation at Charleston was poor. Because of disease and death, a Mr. Blackstone, who occupied what was then called Shawmut Trimountain (due to three distinct hills in the Boston vicinity), invited Winthrop's infant settlement over from Charleston in August of 1630. “Water was the great desideratum of a settlement, was very scarce at Charleston...”⁵³ There was an excellent spring on Blackstone's property along with two large rivers that flowed into the bay.

By September, the settlers held court at Charleston and concluded to change the name of Shawmut Trimountain to “Boston,” after an area in England. Many settlers moved there immediately.

That first winter passed with many losses and much suffering. One woman wrote in March of 1631, “We found the Colony in a sad and unexpected condition, above eighty of them being dead the winter before, and many of those alive weak and sick; all the corn and bread amongst them all hardly sufficient to feed them a fortnight...”⁵⁴

Robert and Sarah endured the situation that winter at Charleston but moved to better land across the river in early 1631.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Winsor, p. 101

⁴⁹ Bradford, p. 280-281

⁵⁰ Banks, p. 95

⁵¹ Words written by Anne Bradstreet, White, p. 115

⁵² Wood, p. 28

⁵³ Drake, p. 4

⁵⁴ Winsor, p. 113

⁵⁵ I have no document supporting this date beyond family history sketches.

A New Family in the New World

*"It would be no unprofitable thing for you to pass over the several streets and call to mind who lived here so many years ago."*⁵⁶

In Boston, Robert and Sarah set about building a home and having a family. The first buildings in Boston were extremely crude; the Walker home was likely made of wood, a rectangular pole frame with an arched, thatched roof. The poles were lashed together with vines; bark and matting covered the skeleton, and a chimney built of wood then covered with clay. House-raising was a hard task and a labor that involved many. Thomas Dudley, one of the Church's founders wrote of this experience:

*...they who had health to labor fell to building, wherein many were interrupted with sickness, and many died weekly, yea, almost daily...Insomuch that the ships being now upon their return, some for England, some for Ireland, there was, as I take it, not much less than a hundred,...which returned back again; and glad were we so to be rid of them.*⁵⁷

That some people returned to England was apparently good. The remainder set about building homes. These homes were both practical and socially acceptable. Practical from the point of view that they emulated what their Native American neighbors lived it. Socially acceptable from the point that anyone who tried to make something look too nice was chastised for doing so.⁵⁸

Even until the late 1700s, Boston remained a town of wood. The area was thinly wooded, so the settlers had to go inland to find building material. Once finished, the cabin's windows were covered with oiled paper or animal skins.

Central in the home was the fireplace. Fires were used for light, heat, and cooking — and kept burning round the clock. If a fire died, settlers kept flint and steel on hand to start another or simply sent a child to a neighbor's for a bucket of coals.

For light at nights, especially winter nights that darkened quickly and forced people indoors, the colonists lit pine knots containing resin that burned with clear light. Another solution was a "betty lamp," which was a metal, saucer-like container that hung from a chain and was filled with grease and fat from other cooking. As conditions improved and fat became more abundant, the colonists switched to tallow candles to light their cabins.⁵⁹

Fortunately, water was abundant and good, making pasturing and grazing easy and supplying personal needs a small task. In their first few years there, these settlers hovered on the brink of starvation, however, living upon clams, muscles, groundnuts, and acorns — all of which were easier to get in the summer than the winter. But most settlers remained optimistic and viewed their being in America as of having great purpose. One wrote, "God, who delights to appear in greatest straights, did work marvelously at this time; for...about the month of February or March, in comes Mr. Pearce, laden with provisions."⁶⁰ Pearce had been sent back to Ireland for provisions, and a day of thanksgiving was held throughout the colony on February 22, 1631.

⁵⁶ Drake, p. 4

⁵⁷ White, p. 116

⁵⁸ Drake, p. 9

⁵⁹ Madison, p. 32

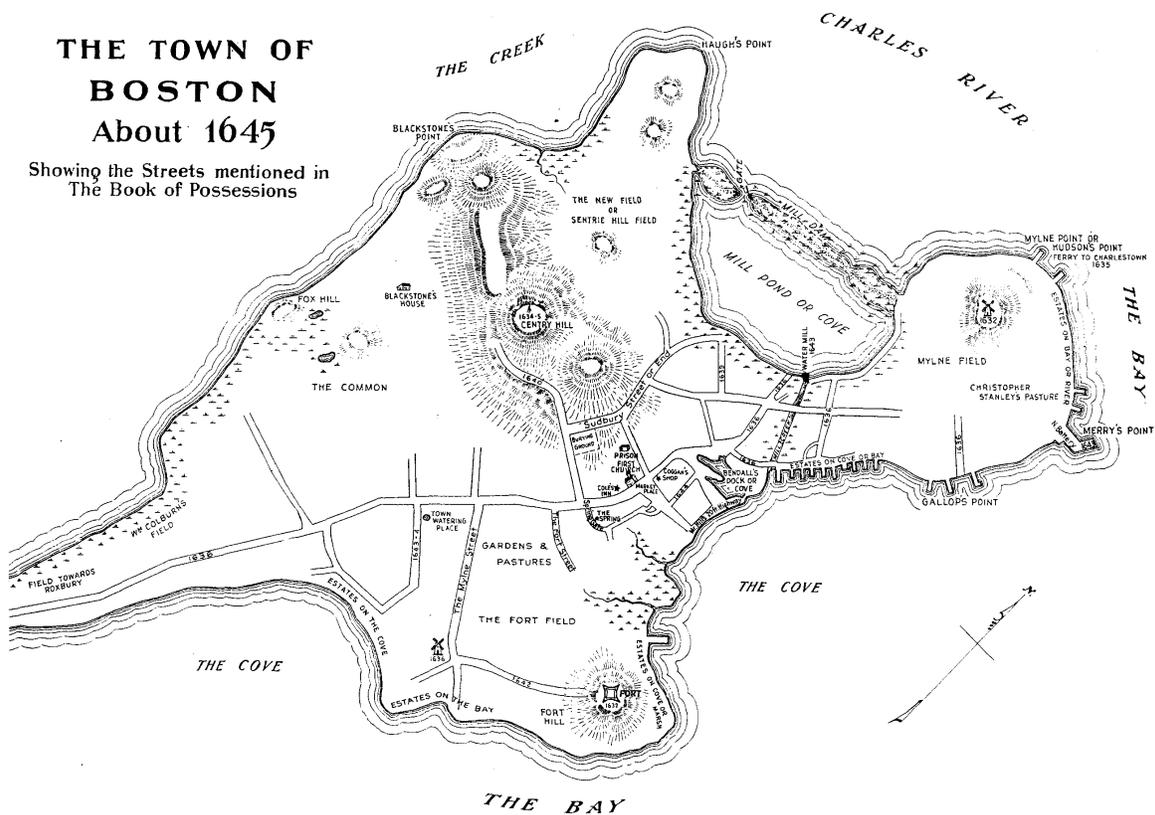
⁶⁰ White, p. 119

Owning Land

In Boston, the settlers set aside a common pastureland for all the colonists, called the common. "The land surrounding the common was divided into lots. The most important people in the colony received parcels facing the common; the ordinary citizen had to find land wherever he could for his family's home and farm."⁶¹

Robert was given a house lot on the southwest corner of Boylston Street.⁶² His lot was next to an area that would be officially designated on March 30, 1640 as the Boston Common, with further encroachment prohibited by this decree (which also states where Robert Walker's lot was):

Ordered, that no more land be granted in the Town out of the open ground or common field, which is between Centry Hill and Mr. Colbron's end, except 3 or 4 lots to make up the street from Bro. Robt. Walker's to the Round Marsh.⁶³



Boston about 1645 (Thwing, insert p. 12-13)

⁶¹ Madison, p. 33

⁶² Annie Haven Thwing, *The Crooked & Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston*, Marshall Jones, Boston 1920, p. 8, 228. The lot that his home stood on was bounded by the land of Thomas Snow on the east, the common on the north, the High Street (now Washington Street) on the south, and the land of William Brisco on the west. His garden was bounded by the land of William Talmage on the east, the High Street on the north, the land of John Cranwell on the west, and the land of Jacob Elliot on the south. (Coddington, p 66, also *Boston Book of Possessions*, p. 33, 62)

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 305

Robert's house was on the southern side of the common, on the corner opposite the Hotel Pelham, on Boylston Street, which was also called "Frog Lane" because of its abrupt ending in a marsh.⁶⁴

Later in his life (on June 10, 1684 at the age of about 78 years), Robert verified that the town was built through the acquisition of land from others.⁶⁵ Robert sold his lot in later years.⁶⁶ He owned a house and garden bounded on the north by Boston Common, the main park in town—used for a pasture and for military parades.

Everyone pitched in to make the town thrive. Robert was the town's official cow keeper in 1638⁶⁷ and he pastured cows in the rear of his house on the common. The common quickly became the center of village life.

The town began to run efficiently. A watchman was set to cry the time of night and an account of the weather. Nine selectmen ran the affairs of the town. By 1632, Boston was declared "the fittest place for public meetings of any place in the Bay"⁶⁸ and thereby became the capital of what would later become Massachusetts. The town officers concerned themselves primarily with allotments of land—giving two acres to plant on.⁶⁹ They also regulated the price of cattle, commodities, food, and wages in the town.

⁶⁴ Winsor, p. 542

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 224-225

⁶⁶ No date, Thwing, p. 228.

⁶⁷ Coddington, p. 195

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 14

Chapter 6

Starting a Family

The 1630s began a busy time of child rearing for the couple, with three children born. Sarah may have felt as her contemporary Anne Bradstreet did in her description of bringing children into this world:

*I had eight birds hatcht in one nest,
Four Cocks there were, and Hens the rest,
I nurst them up with pain and care,
Nor cost, nor labour did I spare,
Till at the last they left their wing,
Mounted the Trees, and learn'd to sing.⁷⁰*

In all, 12 children would be brought into the Walker home, eight boys and four girls. Sarah saw nine grow to adulthood—an unusual fete in that day—while three died at various ages. Losing children must have been difficult, although many experienced it. Infant death rates were high, and common curable ailments today were often the culprit in taking many children and many mothers away. For those who died, no records exist indicating how they died. The family was healthy and strong, for the most part. John, their youngest, died at age 21 or 22, while Joseph died at age 41 in 1687, the same year as Robert.

Keeping Shop

Robert was a shopkeeper, presumably selling cloths of all types, as that was the profession he had learned in England.⁷¹ Making and selling cloth was extremely valuable to the colonies. Most people tried to bring what they could with them from England, but space was restricted and clothes wore out quickly given the type of work that had to be completed in New England. One writer advised that

Every man likewise must carry over good store of apparel; for if he come to buy it there [in Boston], he shall find it dearer than in England. Wollen cloth is a

Robert and Sarah Walker's Children

1. Elishua (or Elizabeth), born February 14, 1635, christened 2/28/1635
2. Zechariah, born September 15, 1637, christened 10/1/1637, died at Woodbury, Connecticut 1/20/1699/1700
3. John, born 9/22/1639, christened 9/29/1639 (died 7/22/1652 at the age of 13)
4. Sarah, born 11/15/1641, christened 11/28/1641 (died at the age of 2)
5. Jacob, born 3/21/1643 or 1644 (christened 3/24/1644), died in old age
6. Joseph, born about 7/14/1646, christened 7/19/1646 (“aged 5 days”), died 11/19/1687 (at age 41)
7. Thomas, twin, born about 4/12/1649, christened 4/22/1649 (“aged about 10 days”), no death information available
8. Mary, twin, born about 4/12/1649, christened 4/22/1649 (“aged about 10 days”), died young
9. Timothy, christened 9/1/1650 (no birth information available), no death information available
10. Eliakim, born 7/3/1652 (christened 7/4/1652, died 9/30/1654 at 2 years of age)
11. Mary, born 11/1/1654 (christened 11/5/1654), no death information available
12. John Walker, born 7/14/1656 (christened 7/20/1656), died 1678/79 (age 21 or 22)

⁷⁰ White, p. 4

⁷¹ Thomas, p. 141

*very good commodity and linen better, as holland, lockram, flaxen, hempen, calico stuffs, linsey-woolseys, and blue calico, green sayes for housewives' aprons, hats, boots, shoes, good Irish stockings, which if they be good are much more serviceable than knit ones.*⁷²

Charles the First, King of England, defined the fashions, customs, and manners of the time. "The short cloak, doublet, and silk stockings were worn by people of condition [or class], but the colors were subdued and sober, and the rapier [sword], which King Charles's gallants were so ready to draw, was not much worn abroad, except on state occasions. Some, like Winthrop, wore the stiff, plaited ruff, containing a furlong of linen...while others wore the broad falling collar..."⁷³

"The men wore wide-brimmed hats, black doublets with simple white collars, baggy breeches, stockings, and square-cut shoes. A woman's apparel consisted of a long-sleeved dress with neckerchief and a white linen apron. Whenever she went outdoors, a Puritan female wore a kerchief or hood to cover her head."⁷⁴ Buttons were to be avoided—mainly due to their Puritan religion—and eliminated wherever possible. Loops and ties were used to keep clothing connected.

Their clothes were not drab—just simple. Women's clothing was dyed with "sad" colors—brown, dull green, and purple. Some men wore green coats and even red hats.⁷⁵

Their hair was often a symbol of their religion. Men of the straightest sect wore straight hair, cut "in the short fashion of roundheads; while others to whom nature had perhaps, been more lavish in this respect, wore their hair long." Ladies wore veils.⁷⁶

Becoming a Freeman

A significant early event in Robert's Boston life was that of him becoming a "freeman." Official records indicate that this took place on May 14, 1634 at Genall Hall in Boston. A freeman could "exercise the right of suffrage" or voting, hold any public office, and must be accepted as such by the general or quarterly court. "To become such, he was required to produce evidence that he was a respectable member of some Congregational church."⁷⁷ Robert Walker would have sworn an oath likely as follows:

I [Robert Walker] being by Gods providence, an Inhabitant, and Freeman, within the Jurisdiction of this Commonwealth; do freely acknowledge my self to be subject to the Government thereof: And therefore do here swear by the great and dreadful Name of the Ever-living God, that I will be true and faithfull to the same, and will accordingly yield assistance & support thereunto, with my person and estate, as in equity I am bound; and will also truly endeavor to maintain and preserve all the liberties and priviledges thereof, submitting my self to the wholesome Lawes & Orders made and established by the same. And further, that I will not plot or practice any evill against it, or consent to any that shall so do; but will timely discover and reveal the same to lawfull Authority now here established, for the speedy preventing thereof.

Moreover, I doe solely bind my self in the sight of God, that when I shall be called to give my voyce touching any such matter of this State, in which Freeman are to deal, I will give my vote

⁷² Wood, p. 71

⁷³ Ibid., p. 11

⁷⁴ Madison, p. 36

⁷⁵ Madison, p. 38

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 11

⁷⁷ *New England Historical*, p. 41

*and suffrage as I shall judge in mine own conscience may best conduce and tend to the publike weal of the body, So help me God in the Lord Jesus Christ.*⁷⁸

One hundred and four men were made freemen that same day.⁷⁹ By 1648, 1,809 men had been given the status of freemen.⁸⁰ Freemen ran the government, choosing the governor, deputies, and assistants. No one else had voice in the government.

Central to this government was the town meeting. Town meetings served as educators and conservative forces in New England life.⁸¹

*The annual meeting was always opened with prayer, and was governed by the rules common to parliamentary bodies. Each "freeman" had an equal voice in its deliberations and an equal vote in its action. It admitted of the utmost freedom within certain well-defined limits. The moderator was chosen by majority vote, and his decisions were final, though subject to an appeal to the house. The town meeting was the town itself, acting in both a legislative and an executive capacity. The "select-men" were simply the agents employed by the town, and chosen by popular suffrage, to carry out its will...The town meeting shares with the church and the common school the honor of shaping and controlling New England civic and social life. Attendance upon town meetings, and taking part in them, if only to the extent of voting, unconsciously moulded the minds and formed the habits of men.*⁸²

The practice of having freemen administer the government began to fall apart in 1663, based on the unwieldy size of the gathering and the lengthy debates that ensued. This practice officially ended around 1688.⁸³

Robert's brother-in-law Jacob (Sarah's older brother) was admitted as a freeman on June 2, 1641. He had immigrated to New England from his childhood neighborhood of Hadleigh, Kersey and settled at Boston in 1638.⁸⁴ Jacob came with his second wife, Elizabeth, and her two children by a former marriage. The couple had no other children and so immediately drew close to the oldest children of Robert and Sarah.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 41, spelling preserved.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 92-93

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 45

⁸¹ Lamson, p. 24

⁸² Ibid., p. 24-25

⁸³ Ibid., p. 89

⁸⁴ Jacob and Elizabeth were among three thousand people that emigrated on 20 ships from England in 1638. No record is available of which ship they sailed on (Banks, *Planters*, p. 190)

⁸⁵ In Jacob Leager's will of 1662, he left one-third of his estate to his third wife Anna (Elizabeth having died some time prior to 1650—the year he married Anna), and the other two-thirds to his two daughters, Bethia and Hannah. In the event that they were to die, never marry, or never have children, Jacob wished that one-third of his estate go to the children of his sister Marie (still in England) and 10 pounds each to Jacob, Joseph, and Elishua Walker (adult children of Robert and Sarah Walker), with the remainder going to the Boston Alms House (see Coddington, "Family of Jacob Leager," p. 196. It is assumed that Zechariah (Robert's oldest son) was left out of this list since the will was written in 1662 and Zechariah had moved to Long Island earlier that year as minister of the Congregational church there. There are no indications as to why no other Walker children were included.

Chapter 7

Rules for Governing Life

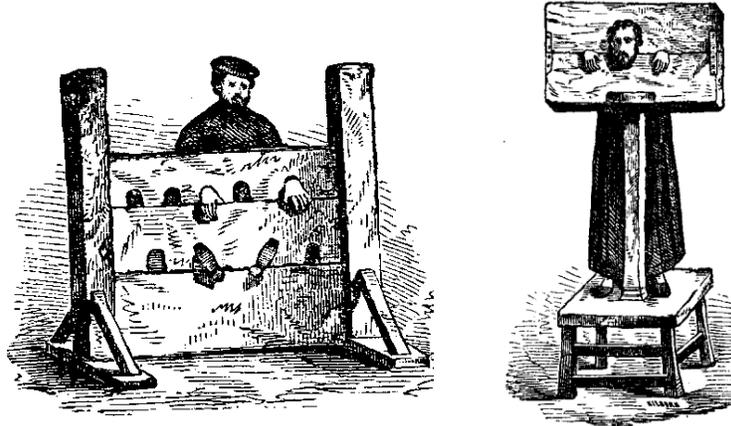
More personal freedom was what most of these people were looking for in coming to America, so simple rules were established to make life good for everyone. The colonists had left their homes, where poverty and hard work reigned, taxation was heavy, and personal choices were limited. Now in New England, the rules were still strict but the change must have been refreshing. They were now self-governing. Some rules they made include the following:

- Galloping through the streets (except on days of military exercise or extraordinary case required it) bore a two shillings fine.
- Football was prohibited in the streets.
- Tobacco was forbidden in public (one shilling fine).
- Allowing strangers or even a physician in your home without permission was a fine of twenty shillings a week.
- The town selectman (much like a mayor) could order parents to bind their children as apprentices (to other people to learn skills and trades) or put them out to service. If parents refused, the town took the children from the parents.
- In a town meeting in 1641, 1,200 men were gathered for two days of training—officers were appointed with long sticks to make sure the men remained attentive and didn't fall asleep at church—to be absent from the meeting was criminal.
- To speak ill of a minister brought serious punishment.
- A man was fined for kissing his own wife on his own grounds (probably outside).
- If your lights were on after 10 o'clock, someone stopped to ask why—if you were noisy, dancing, or singing after that hour you were asked to cease—if you continued, you were reported to the town constable.
- Young men and women “not of known fidelity” (meaning engaged to be married) were seen walking after 10 o'clock, they were confronted as to why, observed to see that they did nothing wrong, and told to go to their own homes—if they refused they were secured “till morning.”
- Harboring a Quaker (a person of that religious group) bore a fine of 10 shillings.
- Anyone denying the Bible to be the word of God would pay 50 pounds, be whipped with up to 40 strokes. Unless he publicly recanted he would pay an additional 10 pounds or be whipped again—repeating this could result in banishment or even death, based on what the court determined.
- A child “of sound understanding” that cursed or struck his parents would be punished with death.⁸⁶
- A child playing at a church meeting caused his parents to be fined 3 shillings—a day and a half's wages. If one was caught running, jumping, or singing on the Sabbath, you would be fined forty shillings—more than 20 days' wages.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 12-13, 15

⁸⁷ Madison, p. 33

Beyond fines, other common punishments included the whipping post, stocks, and the pillory. These were used to enforce attendance and punish offenses against the church. They were frequently located near the churches, standing as a gentle reminder to all who attended that obedience was important. The scarlet letter is no myth—the story written by Nathaniel Hawthorne is based on a form of punishment that no doubt existed in early New England.⁸⁸



The pillory and the stocks—common forms of punishment of the day
(Drake p. 93)

The Life of a Wife

Robert relied heavily on Sarah to raise and manage a family. By 1640, the couple had three children, Elishua (5), Zechariah (3), and John (3 months). The three children offered only a glimpse of the large family to come and the unending labor involved feeding and caring for them. Sarah played a vital role in making all of this possible—from alternating cycles of pregnancy and nursing to roles that were much more than that of “mother.”

“A married woman in early New England was simultaneously a housewife, a deputy husband, a consort, a mother, a mistress, a neighbor, and a Christian.”⁸⁹ Sarah’s life was one filled with simple pleasures at best, the rest being work. She was a “good” wife, one who filled the role as prescribed by the culture of the time, one who cooked, spun wool, gave birth to many children (often losing many as well), and one who supported a husband in representative assemblies, social activities, home building, and earning a living.

Sarah very likely carried out her duties as a good wife, including the following:

- “A housewife polished female specialties. Her role was defined by a space (a house and its surrounding yards), a set of tasks (cooking, washing, sewing, milking, spinning, cleaning, gardening), and a limited area of authority (the internal economy of the family).
- A deputy husband shouldered male duties. These might be of the most menial sort—for a weaver’s wife, winding quills for the loom; for a farmer’s wife, planting corn—but they could also expand to include some responsibility for the external affairs of the family. A deputy was not just a helper but at least potentially a surrogate.

⁸⁸ Lamson, p. 92, 93

⁸⁹ Ulrich, p. 9

- A consort tuned her life to her mate's. For the blessed, marriage harmonized spirituality and sexuality, two concepts frequently at odds in the western world. For the unblessed, it brought clacking and clanging and sometimes an appearance in the county court.
- A mother spent herself to perpetuate the race. As a biological rule, motherhood bound women to alternating cycles of pregnancy and lactation. As a social rule, it elevated selflessness and love, finding in women a capacity for affection which counterbalanced the presumably more authoritarian government of fathers.
- A mistress served those who served her. She trained, supervised, and often fed and clothed a succession of neighbors' daughters who rewarded her efforts by leaving her to marry, becoming mistresses themselves.
- A neighbor sustained the community of women, gossiping, trading, assisting in childbirth, sharing tools and lore, watching and warding in cases of abuse. Relations between neighbors could be vertical and horizontal, embracing the obligations of charity and deference as well as ordinary helpfulness and sociability.
- A Christian seized spiritual equality and remained silent in church. Among the Congregationalist majority in New England, women could sign the covenant, enlarge the scriptures, write and even publish, but only among the Quakers could they hold office or preach in mixed assemblies. Sharing a common bench in church, female Christians nudged the edges of a contradictory religious identity.
- A heroine burst the bonds of female anonymity, projecting private virtues into the public sphere. Visibility, more than anything else, separated her from an ordinary wife. Indian captivity amplified the trials of motherhood and tested Christian faith; garrison life magnified neighborliness; while the continuous threat of attack called forth the 'manly resolution' already expected of deputy husbands."⁹⁰

Sarah was such—a “good wife”—who could be compared to the verses of Proverbs 31:10-31. She was a willing servant to her family and friends (“she riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meet to the household”) and a skilled manufacturer (“she seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh it willingly with her hands”). She was a hard-working agriculturist (“with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard”) and a resourceful trader (“she is like the merchants' ships, she bringeth her food from afar”). She was one blessed with the ability to direct, inspire, and nurture others (“she openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness”).⁹¹

Home Making

Early Boston life was a combination of city and country living. Home manufacturing was an essential part of getting by. With her husband being a linen weaver, Sarah likely wound many quills, prepared fabrics to be died, and provided invaluable assistance in the process of producing family income. Wives of shopkeepers still kept a pig or two, gardened, and even milked cows.⁹²

Sarah's household inventory likely included an array of chairs, tables, spinning wheels, bowls, plates, and various sundry items. Luxury items such as looking glasses (mirrors), framed pictures, and pieced quilts were becoming quite common. Because food usually went directly from producer to consumer, much time was spent filling the family's pantry. The town was likely

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 9-10

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 14

⁹² Ibid., p. 15-16

laid out helter-skelter, with residences of the rich near the houses of carpenters and fisherman. Centers of retail gradually developed, but initially many trips were made to street markets and harbors, and multiple transactions involving cash and barter were conducted to put each meal together. “Sugar, wine, and spices came by sea; fresh lamb, veal, eggs, butter, gooseberries, and parsnips came by land. Merchants retailed their goods in shops or warehouses near their wharves and houses. Farmers or their wives often hawked their produce door to door.”⁹³

Quality goods were hard to find. Trading for good food often required as much energy and skill as manufacturing it or growing it. Sarah had to develop a keen sense of knowing where to find these goods—she likely developed a plan for where to visit for which items and repeated that frequently. This knowledge was likely collected and shared with neighbors.

*Keeping abreast of the arrival of ships in the harbor or establishing personal contact with just the right farmwife...required time and attention. Equally important was the ability to evaluate the variety of unstandardized goods offered. An apparently sound cheese might teem with maggots when cut. As cash was scarce, a third necessity was the establishment of credit, a problem that ultimately devolved upon husbands. But petty haggling over direct exchanges was also a feature of this barter economy.*⁹⁴

Mealtime

Mealtime brought the family together, men and older sons sitting at the table still wearing their hats, the wife sitting beside her husband, and the younger children standing around the table eating whatever they were given and not speaking a word. “The Puritans were healthy eaters and heavy drinkers. A Puritan family—including the children—would start their day with a ‘morning draft’ of beer or ale. Later, because of the plentiful supply of apples, the morning drink became hard cider.”⁹⁵

*Although some families merely placed the cooking pot on the table for everyone to eat directly from the container, most people had utensils. A wooden trencher served as a plate. A trencher was generally rectangular in shape—merely a piece of wood with the center hollowed out. Two diners share one trencher. Each person had a linen napkin, because everyone ate with their fingers. If the food was too soupy, spoons were used or the liquid was sopped up with pieces of bread. No knives were placed on the table, because each man and older boy had a sheathed knife at his waist. This could be extracted and passed around when needed. Also on the table were wooden noggins or pewter tankards for either milk, beer, or cider.*⁹⁶

After dinner, the family—including children—enjoyed a smoke. Tobacco in clay pipes was lit from the fire using small tweezers called smoking tongs to lift a hot ember from the fireplace.⁹⁷

Washing

Other highly visible activities at home centered on caring for clothing and cooking meals. Whether the Walkers had a washhouse is not known, but they likely had a washtub, soap, a

⁹³ Ibid., p. 27

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 27

⁹⁵ Madison, p. 38

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 39-40

⁹⁷ Madison, p. 40

beating staff, and a place to boil laundry and heat rinse water, and somewhere to hang clothes to dry. The woolen jackets and petticoats of the day were rarely if ever washed, but linens, aprons, shirts, pants, and handkerchiefs required occasional washing. Doing laundry was likely not a weekly affair in most colonial households, but it did happen occasionally.⁹⁸

By 1649, the Walker household was filled with seven children between the ages of 6 months and 15 years old, the two youngest were twins, and washing was likely a more frequent occurrence. When each baby was only a few months old, Sarah may have held the infant over the chamber pot at specific times. “In early infancy, tightly wrapped in [a] cradle, the baby could easily have used five dozen ‘clouts’ and almost as many ‘belly bands’ from one washing to another. Even with the use of a ‘pilch,’ a thick square of flannel securely bound over the diaper, blankets and coverlets occasionally needed sudsing as well.”⁹⁹

A Growing Family

The Walkers owned a business, which was most likely attached to their house. It was a retail store—offering the cloths of a linen webster and possibly finished items of clothing as well. Both Robert and Sarah likely kept shop, as did their children as they grew old enough. Everyone pitched in to keep home life comfortable. And not just with cooking and cleaning. The Walkers likely had spinning wheels and looms, put there not because they herded sheep or refined flax but because they had children. “The mechanical nature of spinning made it a perfect occupation for women whose attention was engrossed by young children....Spinning was a useful craft, easily picked up, easily put down, and even small quantities of yarn could be knitted into caps, stockings, dishcloths, and mittens.”¹⁰⁰ With seven living children and four more to come, attending to young children would fill Sarah’s life during the 1650s.

Along with bringing four additional children into the world, Robert and Sarah also buried a few. For most, burying children was not an uncommon chore. But the Walkers were fortunate, only giving two children up—little Sarah, who died at the age of two around 1643 and tiny Eliakim, who died at the age of two in 1654. In the 1650s, the couple would lose two other children:

- John on a July day in 1652 at the age of 13
- Mary, her youngest and twin to Thomas, while she was “young” (presumably before the age of 5)

Sarah may have heartache similar to that captured by Anne Bradstreet at the loss of her children:

*Farewell dear babe, my heart's too much content,
Farewell sweet babe, the pleasure of mine eye,
Farewell fair flower that for a space was lent,
Then ta'en away unto eternity.
Blest babe, why should I once bewail they fate,
Or sigh thy days so soon were terminate,
Sith [since] thou art settled in an everlasting state.¹⁰¹*

⁹⁸ Ulrich, p. 28

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 28

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 29

¹⁰¹ Norton, p. 132

Such losses were heartbreaking. But compared to those around them, the Walkers had the best of luck, maintaining a large and healthy family at a time when many women lost all of their babies to miscarriage, still birth, infant disease, and accident. Furthermore, Robert kept his wife at a time when many men lost theirs to the same life-giving process.

The couple's oldest son Zechariah began attending the newly formed Harvard College in 1653. What pride they must have felt as they sent a son across the river to advance his education—a privilege that had not been theirs in England. Only 16 when he started school, Zechariah was among 17 students who left Harvard after less than two years and prior to graduating in protest over the lengthening of the time required to earn the Bachelor of Arts degree—from three to four years.¹⁰²

In 1663, Robert was made clerk of the market—a role that involved tracking prices, approving prices, and inspecting goods.

Religion and Disagreement

Shortly after arriving in America, Robert affiliated himself with the First Church. The Puritans had come to America to cleanse or purify the Church of England, so Sabbath services were a serious matter. An early Sunday morning signal (such as a drum roll or gunshot or later a bell tolling) called all families to the meetinghouse. The buildings were plain and hosted wooden benches. Men sat on one side and women on the other. The minister would open with a long prayer, sometimes lasting an hour. The congregation would then rise for a psalm—no singing was allowed—and the congregation was led by a deacon of the church in repeating the psalm one line at a time.¹⁰³

The sermon followed. The minister would preach of the terrible evils of sin, the punishments for sinning, and the prescription for a better life. Sermons could continue as long as four hours. Everyone became restless. A tithingman was on duty to jostle people who fell asleep with a long pole. On one end was a feather or squirrel's tail used to gently wake a woman. On the other end was a knob used to poke a snoring man. After a short break for a noontime meal, everyone came back for the afternoon session.

In May of 1669, due to severe disagreements with the Puritan ecclesiastical leaders in Boston, Robert Walker, along with 27 others, co-founded the third congregational church, now called the Old South Church.¹⁰⁴ The group met at Charleston, which was then in another county, likely to avoid a law that required a magistrate to be consulted before forming another church. Robert and others had applied to the First Church to be dismissed, but that had been denied. Records indicate that the founders were imprisoned for such disobedience.¹⁰⁵ The old church refused to have relations with the new church and denied three times that the wives of the founders (Sarah included) be dismissed so that they could join their husbands in the new church.

Also regarded among the female founders of Old South Church was Robert's wife Sarah.¹⁰⁶ Old South would years later would serve as the gathering place for 5,000 American rebels who would dump British tea into Boston harbor and begin the series of events that led to America's independence. Benjamin Franklin would later be baptized and worship in the Old South Church.

¹⁰² Coddington, p. 67.

¹⁰³ Madison, p. 33-35

¹⁰⁴ *The Form of Covenant*, p.3. Also Winsor, p. 192

¹⁰⁵ Winsor, p. 194

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, part 2, p. 4

Chapter 8

The Age of Wisdom

Robert was very involved in town life, often meeting with others to discuss the affairs of the settlers, religion, and whatever else might be to talk about. Judge Samuel Sewall¹⁰⁷, a close friend and neighbor (and whose father and grandfather Robert had known in England), remarked that he was considering joining the Church in 1677. He wrote that he felt terribly about his own worthiness and “on Saturday Goodman Walker came in, who used to be very familiar with me. But he said nothing of my coming into the Church...at which I was almost overwhelmed.”¹⁰⁸ Apparently, Robert Walker was not one to force his opinion on another. However, Sewall, Robert’s junior by at least 45 years, joined the church shortly after. Sewall’s great grandfather had been Mayor of Coventry in England, also a linen draper by profession and a friend and neighbor of Robert Walker’s father.¹⁰⁹

Sewall was described as part of the “in crowd” and associated with and sought advice from Robert Walker. Robert was an upstanding figure in Boston, definitely a senior colonist, and someone aware of how the town worked. Sewall records multiple encounters with Robert Walker, one again in August of 1685, where he and other men, Robert Walker included, met one night after a funeral for discussion about the admission of newcomers into the Church.¹¹⁰

Robert’s oldest son Zechariah had moved to Jamaica, Long Island in 1662 and then to Woodbury, Connecticut in 1668. In 1685, Zechariah apparently returned home for a few weeks, an ordained minister and one well-versed in scripture. On Wednesday, October 7th, he spoke to a group that met at the home of Samuel Sewall from Genesis 6:8-9 “to very good purpose, shewing how may walk to be in a way of finding favour in God’s Sight. Last Direct. Was to carry it as inoffensively as might towards Men, that our own Rashness and indiscretion might not be the cause of our suffering.”¹¹¹

Due to rainy weather,¹¹² Zechariah aptly spoke on Wednesday, October 21st at a Mrs. Oliver’s from Isaiah 59:19 about the enemy coming like a flood. The full scripture reads:

So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. (Isaiah 59:21, King James Bible)

Sarah Walker also played a significant role in early Boston society as well. Of the little that we know about Sarah, we find that she was a teacher of sorts—probably teaching in her

¹⁰⁷ “The well-to-do Sewalls of England smoothed the path for Samuel to become a rich merchant, landowner, exporter, and influential Boston magistrate. His great-grandfather, Henry, was a wealthy Coventry linendraper-merchant who had served as mayor repeatedly. Another Henry, Samuel’s father, migrated to New England in 1634, supplied with enough cattle and provisions to stock a plantation at Newbury.” (see Wish, 9)

¹⁰⁸ Thomas, p. 39-40

¹⁰⁹ Sewall’s grandfather had emigrated to New England in 1634, returning to England in 1646, where Sewall was born in 1652, moving again to New England in 1661 when Sewall was nine years old, a peer in age to Robert’s and Sarah’s four youngest children (Ibid., p. xxix-xxxx). Sewall would later preside over the Salem witchcraft trials in 1692 (Drake, p. 52)

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. v

¹¹¹ Thomas, p. 79

¹¹² Ibid., p. 80

home. Sewall acknowledges this in his diary on a snowy January 7, 1687 when “Dame Walker is taken so ill that she sends home my Daughters, not being able to teach them.”¹¹³ It is unclear what subjects she taught.

Sickness and Death

In the spring of 1687, the May pole in Charleston was cut down and a bigger one set up, which a few men came to blows over based on the way the decision had been made.¹¹⁴ A few days later, Robert Walker became sick, suffering what was likely a partial stroke. Robert was “taken with Lethargy as was shutting up his shop to goe to their privat Meeting...”

*His left side was chiefly struck with a kind of Palsy: His speech came to him something between 6. And 7. He told me there was plenty of Lavander in the Town where he was Prentice [apprenticed]. He overheard some discourse about the May-Pole, and told what the manner was in England to dance about it with Musick, and that 'twas his Burden which he something insisted on. Had a blistering plaister to his neck, Drops of Lavander in 's mouth and his neck chaf'd with Oyl of Amber.*¹¹⁵

Despite his suffering, Robert still seemed adamant about how the May pole dance should be conducted.

Remedies and Treatment

Robert chose specific remedies for his malady—lavender, something he was familiar with from the days of his apprenticeship and oil of Amber. Because the choice of medicines was limited and people were “not provided of things alwaies ready for such cures that are usuall to be had ready made in other place at Apothecaries,” they instead relied on local plants and home-grown remedies.¹¹⁶

“Amber touch and heal” is also known as St. John’s Wort, a familiar herb today.¹¹⁷ St. John’s Wort was familiar then as well—it was used as a dye for the color beige or yellow with alum for wool and violet-red silk dye with alcohol.¹¹⁸ It was a panacea of sorts, one used for anxiety, bed-wetting, bronchial inflammation, burns, cancer, depression, hemorrhoids, insect bites and stings, insomnia, kidney disease, scabies, stomach pain, underactive thyroid, and wound healing.¹¹⁹

*[It] comes from the flowering tops of the perennial plant Hypericum perforatum L. The flower’s red-staining oil accounts for the herb’s peculiar name. According to legend, St. John’s wort arose from the blood of John the Baptist after his beheading.*¹²⁰

Oils in general help with healing of bruises, wounds, varicose veins, ulcers and sunburn. Oils also traditionally serve as a pain reducing sedative tea for anemia, rheumatism, headaches and nervous conditions.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 130

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 140

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 141

¹¹⁶ Gill, p. 40

¹¹⁷ <http://onhealth.com/ch1/resource/pharmacy/Multum0/item,74389.asp>

¹¹⁸ Bremness, p. 199, 276

¹¹⁹ Fetrow, p. 429

¹²⁰ Ibid.

Lavender was also a well-used herb of the day.

Tranquility and purity are inherent in the unique fragrance of lavender.... Its name derives from the Latin 'lavare' meaning "to wash." It has insect-repellent properties, is used to mask household and street smells. Stories that the glovers [glove makers] of Grasse, who used lavender oil to scent their fashionable leather, were remarkable free of plague, encouraged other people to carry lavender to ward off the pestilence. Lavender has long been used medicinally. The herbalist Gerard, for example, prescribed it to bathe the temples of those with a "light migrain swimming of the braine." Its healing powers are now mainly obtained from the essential oil. Medicinal purposes include:

- *As a tea for headaches, calming nerves, easing flatulence, fainting, dizziness and halitosis*
- *As an oil for an antiseptic, mild sedative and painkiller*
- *A massage oil in aromatherapy for throat infections, skin sores, inflammation, rheumatic aches, anxiety, insomnia and depression.*¹²¹

A Very Good Man from the Beginning

Despite this therapy, Robert's condition worsened until two days later on May 29, 1687 Judge Sewall was called to his bedside. Sewall wrote:

*May 29 Sabbath.... Dame Walker desired me to pray with her husband, which I do and write two notes, one for our House and one for the Old. Sam[uel Jr.] carries the first. Between 12. and one Robert Walker dies, about a quarter after twelve. He was a very good man and conversant among God's New England People from the beginning. About one, several great Guns were fired.*¹²²

A note in Sewall's diary says that it was custom to put up a note on the church door requesting prayers for the afflicted. As Robert Walker had belonged to the First Church as well as the Old South, Sewall had notes posted on doors at both locations.¹²³ It is possible that the church bell also tolled. As custom, during the week this bell would alert field workers that dinnertime had arrived. "Less happy news, such as death, was also spread by the tolling of the bell."¹²⁴

*Nine strokes would indicate a man had died; six signaled a woman's death; and three strokes indicated a child had perished. At times, short, quick strokes followed the traditional number to broadcast the age of the deceased person.*¹²⁵

Nine bells would have tolled for Robert Walker.

Many funerals were poorly attended, possibly based on how frequently they took place for young and old alike. Robert's funeral, however, was well attended by friends, city officials, and dignitaries. Robert was an original settler of Boston, so it was appropriate that Governor Simon Bradstreet, another original settler who also emigrated with the Winthrop fleet, also attend. During the funeral, the church bell likely rang steadily as the funeral party followed the coffin to the cemetery. As Sewall noted:

¹²¹ Bremness, 89, 237, 243, 247

¹²² Thomas, p. 141 footnote

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Madison, p. 41

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Tuesday, Goodm[an] Walker is buried, Capt. Eliot, Frary, Hill, Deacon Allen, Mr. Blake, Pain, Bearers; Mr. Saunderson and Goodm. Serch lead the Widow, Govr Bradstreet, Mr. Cook, Mr. Addington, with the chief Guests, were at our House. Burial over about four oclock.¹²⁶

The gathering at Sewall's home next door to the Walker residence¹²⁷ afterward provided necessary comfort to the widow. Eight of Robert's twelve children were living at the time of his death.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹²⁷ Thomas, p. 309

Chapter 9

Sarah Alone

Life for Sarah went as usual for a few more years. She remained single, cared for by her children, primarily Elishua's daughters, Mary and Mehetabel.

From the time of Robert's death in 1687 to 1695, much happened in Boston. Robert's friend Samuel Sewall was called to hold court in Salem, Massachusetts, trying many and sentencing several to death on charges of witchcraft. Quakers were hung in the Common for creating confusion and blasphemy. Boston's population swelled to about 7,000.¹²⁸ The town was becoming a city, one clearly the hub of government on a newly populated continent.

On December 19, 1695, Samuel Sewall visited Sarah Walker, who was ailing. His son Samuel Jr. was there as well. Sarah "pray'd God to bless him, and to bless all my posterity," according to Sewall's diary.¹²⁹ On December 20th, her situation grew worse. Sewall recorded:

Dec. 20. Dame Walker is very restless; said she was past all food now, had quite lost her Appetite. Said, why does living man complain, man for the punishment of his Sin? Justified God, and pray'd Him to help her, and enable her to bear what He had laid on her; spoke how hard twas to comply with that Text, Thy will be done; we would fain have our own Wills; but God could of unwilling make us willing. Last night she pray'd that God would take her to Himself. When I took leave this morn, she Thank'd me for all my Visits, and acknowledged the kindness of me and my family. After I was gon, in the Afternoon, Dec. 20. Mehetabel [Thurston¹³⁰] sais she heard her Grandmother say, How long Lord, how long? Come Lord Jesus! Mehetabel asked what she said to her, she reply'd How good is God.

Seventh Dec. 21. Between 8. and 9. I went to see Dame Walker and found her very weak and much alter'd. Mehetabel told her I was there, she said with a low voice, I thank him. Afterward Mehetabel ask'd her if should pray, she said, I stand in need. Twas the last day of the Week, and so I went to prayer, insisting on God's being a present help in time of need, and pray'd that God would strengthen her Faith, that so she might enter into his Rest. I ask'd her if she heard, her Answer was, I thank God, I did. I went home to Prayer, Intending after that to go to Mr. Willard to pray him to give her one Lift more heaven-ward. But before I could get away, a Girl came running to call me. And by that time I could get thether, the Good woman had expired, or was just expiring, being about Ten of the clock in the morning. God fulfilled his good Work in her and kept her Leaf from withering.

She had an odd Concept all the last night of her life, that she was in Travail; and though she ceas'd groaning and gave attention to me when at prayer; yet one of the last words I heard her say, was, My child is dead within me; which were indeed some of the very last.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Drake, p. 20

¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 342

¹³⁰ Mehetabel was a daughter of Elishua (Sarah's oldest daughter), who married Benjamin Thurston in 1660. Benjamin was also among the original members of the Old South Church in 1669 and died in 1678 of small pox. Mehetabel was approximately 30 years old when she cared for Sarah.

¹³¹ Ibid., p. 342-343

On Tuesday, December 23, 1695, Sarah Walker was buried. Bearers were Mr. Ezekiel Chiever, Captain Theophilus Frary, Captain James Hill, William Daws, John Maryon, Deacon Joseph Bridgham, along with a host of friends, city officials, and Sewall's daughters who had been taught earlier by Sarah. "Very comfortable Wether overhead, something dirty under foot," Sewall noted.

Most touching were Sewall's observations of his son Samuel, who was 18 at the time.¹³² "After Sam[uel] came home, he was exceedingly affected, shed many Tears, and is even overwhelmed with Sorrow: The Lord grant that removal of one of his best friends may put him upon seeking unto God betimes and making Him his Hiding Place."¹³³ No record exists to describe the friendship between Sarah and young Samuel. Perhaps it was that of a teacher and pupil. Perhaps it was one of neighbors. In any case, that Sarah had left such a mark was profound and noteworthy.

Sarah "Was buried just about Sun-set."¹³⁴ A few days later, Sewall made another significant journal entry on the matter:

Jan. 11, 1696. I write a Letter to Mr. Zech. Walker acquainting him with his Mother's death and Funeral [who had moved to Woodbury, Connecticut in 1678]; that some Recompence ought to be made to Mehetabel and Mary¹³⁵ for their faithfull and Laborious Attendance on their Grandmother. Altho' I reckon my self abundantly satisfied for any little Service I did or could doe for our dear friend, by her desireable Company and hartly Thanks; yet I earnestly desire your Prayers, that my aged Father and Mother may live and die with such like Faith and frame of Spirit as this our Sarah did.¹³⁶

¹³² Samuel Junior was born in June 1678 (Thomas, p. xxxii)

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 343

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵ Mary was also a daughter of Elishua, in her 30s when she cared for Sarah.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 345

Chapter 10

If Ever Two Were One

A people which takes no pride in the achievements of remote ancestors, will never achieve anything worthy to be remembered with pride by remote descendants.
--Macaulay¹³⁷

Robert and Sarah Walker spent approximately 48 years together, from an exciting but quick courtship and possibly an equally quick decision to leave England, to enduring the hardships and success of settling in America and living together well into old age. What joy they must have felt to see Boston grow from open pasture to thriving city, to see the cradle of America's future liberty established, and to plant their own seed in this new land.

Their contributions are best measured by their eagerness to come to America and remain. But of them, their relationship was about purpose, togetherness, and oneness. The American poetess (and contemporary of the Walkers) Anne Bradstreet described her own relationship with her husband, words that easily apply to Robert and Sarah:

*If ever two were one, then surely we.
If ever man loved by wife, then thee;
If ever wife was happy in a man,
Compare with me, ye women, if you can.
I prize thy love more than whole mines of gold
Or all the riches that the East doth hold.
My love is such that rivers cannot quench,
Nor ought but love from thee, give recompense.
Thy love is such I can no way repay,
The heavens reward thee manifold, I pray.
Then while we live, in love let's so persevere
That when we live no more, we may live ever.¹³⁸*

New England Stock

The founders of New England were among the best and the brightest that England had to offer. Although middle class by birth, their freedom in the New World allowed them to expand to their fullest capacity.

They were largely descendents of the liberty-loving weavers of Flanders who had fled to England in the previous century from the persecutions of the Low Countries, and the small farmers of the southern and eastern counties [of England]. There were of the best stock of English Puritanism. They were not broken-down gamblers and roués. They were of the stuff of which commonwealths

¹³⁷ Lamson, I

¹³⁸ Norton Anthology, p. 131

*are made. They knew that public prosperity must rest on the foundations of intelligence and morality... They were men who prized education, virtue and religion, and they gladly made great sacrifices to secure for themselves and their posterity these inestimable blessings. Their character was of such a strain that it has transmitted its traits through centuries, and has made all succeeding generations its debtors.*¹³⁹

By 1826, it was estimated that three-fourths of the inhabitants of the six New England states descended those who were made freemen before the death of Governor Winthrop (in 1649).¹⁴⁰ No doubt, the posterity of Robert and Sarah now stretches well beyond New England and makes a daunting mark upon the face of many lands today.

¹³⁹ Lamson, p. 32

¹⁴⁰ Lamson, p. 42

About the Author

Brett Walker recently discovered family history (Brett→M. Clyde→Mayor "Mike"→Welby→William Holmes→John→Simeon→Joseph→Timothy→Zechariah→Zechariah→Robert). Brett is a published author ("Fathers" Bookcraft 1998) and works as a marketing manager. He and his wife Kristin have four children and live in Provo, Utah.

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