

**REDISCOVERING JOSEPH ROGERS BY MICHAEL YOEMANS:** While many historical facts are known about Joseph Rogers, discovering who he really was as a person is more difficult. One has to dig a little deeper in order to connect the dots. Starting with the basics, we know that Joseph Rogers was born in 1602/3 in Watford, Northampton, England, and that he and his family came to Leiden, Holland, where they are first recorded in 1618. (Please note that spelling and abbreviations, etc. are shown as they were in the original documents.) By 1620, the family had sold their house and Joseph came with his father Thomas on the Mayflower to Plymouth. His mother Alice, his brother John, and his sisters Elizabeth and Margaret remained behind in Leiden. He married about 1632, and his first child Sarah, was born on 6 August 1633. He and his wife Hannah had eight children: Sarah, Joseph, Thomas, Elizabeth, John, Mary, James, and Hannah. He died between 2 and 15 January 1677/8 at Eastham.

We know that Joseph was about 17 years old when he made the voyage on the Mayflower with his father, and he did not sign the "Mayflower Compact." His father Thomas died sometime the first winter at Plymouth leaving him without adult supervision. Joseph appears to have resided in the William Bradford household for around ten years. One can only imagine that his relationship with Bradford had to have been one of great significance. Born probably about 1590, William Bradford was old enough to have been thought of by Joseph as either an older brother or perhaps a father figure. Considering Bradford's role as a leading figure in the Puritans' Separatist movement and his role as the longtime governor of Plymouth Colony, his influence on Joseph must have been enormous. The book "Signers of the Mayflower Compact" gives some insight on this important relationship when it states: "To show the good company he [Joseph Rogers] kept: In 1627 in dividing the cattle the 11th lot fell to Gov. Bradford, and those wit,--his wife Alles Bradford, and William Bradford, and Joseph Rogers....The intimate relations with Gov. Bradford inclined to a belief of a natural favoritism on his part to young Joseph. He was fully aware of it and, guarded against any increase of this feeling in the public mind."<sup>i</sup>

Another person who must have had a deep effect on Joseph was Myles Standish, who was a lifelong friend of William Bradford. As captain of the militia, he regularly drilled the colonists in the use of muskets and pikes, and Lt. Joseph Rogers served in the Duxbury Company under him. Further evidence of this relationship is shown on October 20, 1645, when the people of Duxbury are granted "a competent pporcion" of land around Saughtuckquett. Joseph Rogers was nominated to be a trustee of this land, along with Myles Standish, John Alden, George Soul, Constant Southworth, and William Brett.

Joseph was authorized in 1636 to operate a ferry on the Jones River charging a penny per passenger. Looking at a map, it appears that the ferry that Joseph operated, which was said to be near his residence, was very strategically located between Plymouth and Duxbury. In fact, the road to Duxbury is said to have run through Joseph and John Rogers property. Colonists transporting themselves and their goods would have found the ferry very convenient as it represented the shortest distance between the two town locations.

It is reported that Joseph moved from Plymouth to Duxbury around 1638, but this move appears to have been much more gradual than published sources would imply. Again referring to the book the "Signers of the Mayflower Compact", it explains that "The colony had spread as to numbers and opinions, so that 'Room for the Pilgrims! Room!' was a cry that required attention, though the break was not sudden or immediate."<sup>iii</sup> The Plymouth population by the end 1630 had grown to about 350-400 people. While Plymouth was not considered fertile enough to maintain crops of sufficient supply, it was

said that “there were plenty of orchards in Duxbury in 1637”. There were also stories of wild turkey, venison and fish found in abundance. The residents there used this suburb for summer quarters, returning to Plymouth winters, and they also attended church there. Among those thus inclined were Standish, Brewster and other stalwarts of the “old comers,” and for some reason of personal attraction this included both Joseph and John Rogers, for in “August, 1643, they were on the list of men in Duxbury able to bear arms between 16 and 20.”<sup>iii</sup>

In 1648, “leave was granted this Leiut. Joseph Rogers to have meadows purchased from the Potanumsquatt Indians, and February 24, 1652, he was appointed “one of the Jurors to lay out the most convenient way from Sandwich to Plymouth.”<sup>iv</sup> Joseph Rogers lived in Duxbury for a number of years, before moving to Eastham around 1646. He apparently resided in Sandwich for a few years around 1650 before returning to Eastham. Here again, it appears that he may have had residences in several different locations. He died in Eastham in January 1677/8; in his will he names his wife Hannah: the only record found that names his wife.

Authors researching Joseph Rogers typically describe him as “an upstanding citizen in the colony”. He was a purchaser in 1626, and is listed as a freeman in 1633<sup>v</sup>. The term “freeman” means that he was a citizen of the Colony, which was restricted to adult males. A freeman had the right to vote for the Governor and Assistants and the right to hold office. The laws did not provide any statutory requirement for freemanship, although the oath of allegiance to the Colony indicated what was expected.<sup>vi</sup> The Freeman Oath Joseph Rogers took is as follows:

“I \_\_\_\_\_ being by God’s providence, an Inhabitant, and Freeman, within the Jurisdiction of this Commonwealth; do freely acknowledge myself 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 faithful to the same, and will accordingly yield assistance and support there unto, with my person and estate, as in equity I am bound; and will also truly endeavor to maintain and preserve all the liberties and privileges thereof, submitting myself to the wholesome Laws and Orders made and established by the same. And further, that I will not plot or practice any evil against it, or consent to any that shall so do; but will timely discover and reveal the same to lawful Authority now here established, for the speedy preventing thereof. Moreover, I do solemnly bind myself in the sight of God, that when I shall be called to give my voice touching any such matter of this State, in which Freemen are to deal, I will give my vote and suffrage as I shall judge in mine own conscience may best conduce and tend to the public weal of the body, So help me God in the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>vii</sup>

By all accounts, Joseph Rogers’ reputation was untarnished by any criminal accusations, and he had a history of community involvement. In 1640, “Joseph Rogers was chosen Constable for the ward of Duxbury, bounded between Jones River and Greens harbour, and to serve the King in that office for the space of one whole yeare and to enter upon the place with the Govr elect.”<sup>viii</sup> This was considered an office of high trust and responsibility and none were elected to it but men of good standing. According to the Statute of Law of Municipal Corporations in Massachusetts “constables in Plymouth Colony were selected on the ground of peculiar fitness; and their remuneration from the first, as it has up to the present, consisted almost wholly of fees determined by law”. In the Plymouth Colony, constables were at first appointed by the General Court, and were charged with the duties of summoning the freeman to all public

meetings for elections and for other town business, and with the service of warrants and the general protection of the public peace.

On June 1, 1647, Joseph Rogers was sworn in as lieutenant of Nauset (later Eastham,) to exercise the men in arms there. He held this office until 1661, when he was released. In 1658, a council of war of sixteen was appointed to include Mr. Collier, Mr. Alden and C. Southworth, which ordered that the military company of Duxbury be allowed to exercise and train, when they wish; and of this company Jonathan Alden was appointed ensign. Josiah Winslow was raised to the chief military command, with the title of Major, and the following were made members of his council: C. Southworth, Lt. Nash, Lt. Joseph Rogers and Ens. Standish. Thirty shillings were granted to every one of a troop of horse, furnished by each town. He was re-sworn into his lieutenant's office in 1664 and held it until his death. Under the English militia system every able-bodied man was regarded as a potential soldier, and this mass of citizen-soldiers was organized into local companies to expedite control and training. Lt. Joseph Rogers would have been one of the local company commanders. Every militiaman was required by law to possess military equipment which he was ordered to keep ready for immediate use; moreover, he was required to engage in periodic training with his local company, under the command of local officers like Lt. Joseph Rogers. There is a strong resemblance between this system of universal military training, or a "nation in arms," and the system established at Plymouth.

To understand what Lt. Joseph Rogers military responsibilities were it is useful to understand the nature of the dangers the New England colonies faced starting in 1637 with The Pequot War which lasted until 1675. The New England colonists were also chronically anxious about Indians overrunning their settlements and farms and about invasion by the Dutch and French during the Anglo-European wars.<sup>ix</sup> To counter this threat, the New Englanders formed a confederation that banded the four colonies together into what was called the "Puritan Club" which included Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven to form a defense against Indians, the French, and the Dutch and to settle inter colonial problems. In 1660 for example, it was ordered that during any appearance of danger, a military watch be kept in the town in the most convenient place for giving an alarm; that the motions of any vessels that appear on the coast be watched; and that three guns be a signal in the night, and fires be lighted, where the alarm is made. The council of war of the colony in 1667 included Gov. Prentice (Pres't.), Alden, Winslow, Capt. Thomas Southworth, Capt. Wm. Bradford, Hinckley, Anthony Thacher, C. Southworth and Nathl. Bacon. They ordered that land and sea watches be kept, that three guns be an alarm at night, with fires, and that the troops of each town may be ordered to go out as scouts, and carry intelligence. They also ordered that each town make return of their number of horse and foot, that soldiers be at the command of their officers, and that the Dutch and French to be considered common enemies. It was ordered that when any town, such as Nauset, is in distress, the next town shall send aid to the number of one third or one half of their own men. Each town was to provide some place of retreat for their women and children on an alarm. Those refusing duty, when commanded, would be fined five shillings. The council of each town in time of danger will divide among the inhabitants the arms and ammunition.<sup>x</sup>

Joseph Rogers was also often involved in community land transactions, serving as a trustee over a piece of Duxbury land in October 1646. In 1664, Lieutenant "Joseph Rogers" is given authority to survey a piece of land from Bridgewater to the Bay line, along with Josias Cooke, Gyles Hopkins, Henry Sampson, and Experience Mitchell. In 1670, Rogers served as a selectman along with Nicholas Snow, Daniel Cole, and Josias Cooke. Since in the early history of the Commonwealth, regularly elected town

officials did not exist, town meetings would periodically “select” prominent citizens to perform the business of the town between town meetings. Gradually, town functions became involved enough to require more consistent supervision leading to the system of election of three and nine “selectmen or “townsmen,” to serve for fixed terms. This system is still in use in Eastham to this day.

From this article, we see that Joseph Rogers served many different roles in the formation, operation, expansion, and protection of Plymouth colony including: Constable, military Lieutenant, and a member of different War Councils, ferryman, Selectman, surveyor as well as his roles as husband, father, and grandfather. He was an active citizen, a Freeman, and most importantly a Christian. Descendants of Joseph Rogers have a right to be very proud of their pilgrim ancestor. In the next article, we will work to rediscover Joseph’s Brother John Rogers.

Sources:

- i. Signers of the Mayflower Compact, by Annie Arnoux Haxtun, Three Parts in One, Originally Published New York 1897-1899, Reprinted, Genealogical Publishing Company, Baltimore, 1968, p. 59
- ii. Ibid, p. 58
- iii. Ibid, p. 58
- iv. Ibid, p. 58
- v. <http://pageofmystery.com/history/Plymouth/Freeman.pdf>. This Pdf provides a list of the Plymouth Colony Freeman as of 1633. There are approximately 90 individuals listed.
- vi. The Plymouth Colony Archive Project Glossary & Notes on Plymouth Colony: <http://www.histarch.illinois.edu/plymouth/GLOSSARY.htm>