

BIOGRAPHY OF REV. HENRY SMITH (1600-1648)

Rev. Henry Smith, was born in 1600 in England. He was educated at Cambridge University receiving his BA in 1621; and his MA 1625, and was ordained a minister, by the Bishop of Peterborough, in 1623. Henry's first wife may of been the daughter of Gabriel Cornish, her name may have been Dorothy but this is not known for sure. Henry and Dorothy had four children: Philippa, Mary, Peregrine and Rebecca.

After Dorothy's death Henry married his second wife Dorothy (?), in 1632 in England. Late in 1635 or very early in 1636 Henry with his wife Dorothy, two daughters and son from his first marriage ventured to New England. As was not uncommon at the time Henry and Dorothy's young son Preserve was born during the six-week journey. The Smiths settled first in Watertown, Massachusetts where their daughter Dorothy was born in 1636. Then they marched through the wilderness to Wethersfield, carrying just their necessities. They had shipped most of their belongings up the river but the ships floundered in a "great storm" and they lost practically everything. Henry built a log house for his family and Dorothy, with what was left of their belongings, did what she could to provide a comfortable home for her growing family. Four more children Samuel, Joanna, Noah and Elizabeth were born to them in Wethersfield where they lost their son, Peregrine, probably within a few years after their move. In addition to her household chores, Dorothy also developed skills with a rifle, and according to her son Samuel, shot several wolves which came too near the house. Rev. Henry Smith was one of the early Puritan ministers of New England. In 1641 Henry became the first settled minister at their church. Prior to that time the settlement had three ministers, each only serving a short period of time. His home lot of five acres was on High Street, the first house north of the meetinghouse. He was described as "a gentleman of good family" and "of uncommon culture, refinement and firmness".

From the very beginning his ministry was troubled. Certain members of his congregation greeted him with suspicion, which led to allegations and accusations. His chief accuser was Mr. Clement Chaplin. Chaplin who moved from Hartford to Wethersfield in 1636 was a wealthy and prominent citizen. He was a large landowner; both he and Rev. Smith had lands allotted to them on both sides of the river in the general distribution of 1639. Mr. Chaplin, a Ruling Elder in the church since 1639, was very influential in the church and the community. Henry was soon embroiled in quarrels with some members of his congregation, which by 1643 had grown bitter and with a large portion of the congregation supporting him. Chaplin's accusations and suspicions along with written declarations grew so numerous that in 1643 the matter was brought before the General Court. After examining the merits of the case, the court ordered Mr. Chaplin to stop and fined him L11 for libeling Mr. Smith. This effectively stopped him from criticizing Mr. Smith, but it did not stop him from bringing various civil suits against the Reverend, forcing the courts again to take action. After their investigation Reverend Smith was exonerated and vindicated. This latest court action effectively quieted Chaplin and his followers. Reverend Smith's ministry moved forward, with no more serious interruptions.

At the time of Rev. Henry's tenure in the pulpit at Wethersfield Connecticut, witchcraft was a popular endeavor, or perhaps I should say accusations of witchcraft were popular. Witchcraft as practiced in Connecticut and Massachusetts appears to have migrated to New England along with the original invaders from the Old Country. It was occasionally lethal to its practitioners and sometimes, it was said, to those on which it was practiced. In the manner of Puritan ministers in New England in those days, the Rev. Henry Smith presided in 1648 at the trial of Mary Johnson. In 1646, she had been sentenced to be whipped for theft, probably at Hartford, which was to be repeated a month later at Wethersfield. On her own confession, she was indicted by a jury in December 7, 1648, as guilty of "familiarity with the Devil." Mather says, "Her confession was attended with such connective circumstances that it could not be slighted." She confessed, he says, that she had murdered a child, and committed other faults of licentiousness. For some months before her execution, she was imprisoned at Hartford, under the care of William Ruscoe. A son was born to her while there. Nathaniel Ruscoe, the jailer's son, agreed with her before her death to bring up and educate the child, which agreement was afterward sanctioned by the court. The jailer was paid L6 10s, for twenty-four weeks' charges to June 6, 1650, from which fact it is inferred that she was executed on that date. Rev. Samuel Stone ministered to her while in prison, and it is said that she became a penitent woman. She was evidently a poor, misguided creature, who accounted for her fault according to the superstition of the age.

Henry caught "the great fever" in 1648 and died age 48, two weeks before the birth of their daughter Elizabeth, in Wethersfield, Hartford, Connecticut, "grieved and wearied with the burdens of his charge." Although their two oldest daughters were married, Dorothy was still left with four young children to support and she married John Russell the following year. The church quarrels did not end with Henry's death and another quarrel in 1659 caused twenty families to leave the church. They moved into the jurisdiction of Massachusetts where they became founders of Hadley. Dorothy's son-in-law, John Russell who had taken Henry Smith's place as pastor of the Wethersfield church, became the first minister at Hadley. His father and Dorothy probably also left Wethersfield at that time. By 1664 they were taking turns with Dorothy's son-in-law, Lieutenant Samuel Smith, in providing shelter in Hadley for the regicides, Goffe and Whalley. "William Goffe was a veteran of the English Civil War which pitted the armies of King Charles I and Parliament against one another." When King Charles was defeated, Goffe and 57 other Parliamentary judges voted to behead him. When his son, Charles II, took the throne in 1660 "he vowed vengeance against his father's killers." At that point Goffe and his father-in-law, Edward Whalley, fled to New England, eventually ending up in Hadley where they hid from 1664 to the late 1670s. Goffe became the center of one of the town's oldest legends. He allegedly came to the Hadley church in 1675 during King Phillip's War to warn of an imminent Indian attack. Since he had been hiding in the Russell home all those years, no one knew him and "when the Indians were repelled, the townspeople believed an angel had been sent to save their village." Dorothy's bible, which she may have given to Goffe, has recently been found

in the Hadley Historical Society collection room, on the upper floor of the Goodwin Memorial Library where it sat in a drawer for almost 20 years. It was originally found in a secret room of the John Russell house in Hadley. On the inside front cover of the bible was written "Dorothy Russell her book." Dorothy wrote her will on the 16th Feb 1681 and her signature on the will is reportedly a perfect match for the one discovered on the bible. Dorothy died in 1694 in Hadley, Hampshire, Massachusetts, aged 88.

Henry and his first wife had four children: Philippa, Mary, Peregrine and Rebecca Smith. Henry and his second wife Dorothy had six children: Preserved, Dorothy, Samuel, Joanna, Noah and Elizabeth Smith.

A description of Henry Smith by his son, Samuel, in a letter to Samuel's son, Ichobod: "...He was five foot ten inches tall and spare of build, tho not leane. He was active as the R'd Skin Men & sinewy. His delighte was in sportes of strengthe, & withe his owne hands he did help to rear bothe our house and the firste meeting house in Wethersfield wherein he preacht yeares to fewe. He was well Featured & Fresh favored with faire Skin & longcurling hair (as near all of us had) with a merrie eye & swete smiling Mouthe, tho he coulde frowne sternlie eno' when need was...I remembered ye sweetnesse & ye Charity of my firste Farther."