

Fort Mary, Biddeford Pool

In the current issue of DownEast Magazine (Volume 51, Issue 4 (Nov., 2004;Pg 76) shows the picture below and a nice narrative on the Biddeford campus of the University of New England.

I saw the picture and recognized a great aerial view of where some interesting history of the Hill Family occurred in the late 1600s.



The picture of the Biddeford Pool (top right) and Hills Beach (Middle) are part of the history of the 2nd and 3rd generation the Hill family. As you go out the peninsular (once called Parker's Neck), you come to the small hill overlooking the 'Gut'. (see map below).

The Characters

Captain John Hill was the son of Roger Hill (d.1698) and grandson of Peter Hill (d. 1667). Capt. John was born in Saco, Maine, in 1666. He started a sawmill on Backus Creek with Francis Backhouse. In 1689, John was commissioned an ensign for King William's War. He served throughout the war, commanding the garrison at Saco, until 1700 when he resigned his commission at the rank of Captain. He married Mary Frost in 1694, and they had four children: John, Abigail, Elisha, and Eunice. Captain Hill was appointed Justice of the Peace in 1710 and Judge of the Court of Common Pleas in 1711. The elder John build his house in Berwick, Maine, near Great Works Falls in 1700-1701. He lived there as a planter until his death in 1713.

Early Landholders

According to tradition Vines and his associates landed originally upon Fletcher Neck, where there were fishing stages. That locality, then known as "Winter Harbor," is now recognizable as the favorite summer resort of Biddeford Pool. On an ancient British map of the "Province of Mayne" dated 1655, six dwellings were depicted upon the western bank of Saco River, one of which may have been intended to represent that constructed to shelter the employed of John Parker, the Biddeford fishmonger. In early days his peninsula was styled "Parker's Neck." About the northerly quadrant of Biddeford Pool were located the pioneer homes of Robert Booth, Ralph Tristram, Richard Hitchcock and Thomas Williams. The dwelling of the latter was mentioned in 1636. The land between that of Williams and Saco River was acquired in 1647 by Richard Cummings, who

conveyed it to Walter Merry. The next habitation on the river was occupied by Henry Boade, before 1636, but it was transferred to James Gibbons and Thomas Mills by Vines in 1642. Boade had removed to Wells. Like that of Boade the rest of the lots upriver were eighty rods in width and extended for 200 rods westward. The next four house lots were assigned, in the order named, to Robert Sankey, Joseph Bowles, Samuel Andrews and William Scadlock. The last two settlers resided upon their lots in 1637. Sankey died before 1642 and his title was acquired successively by John Wright and John Bouden. Bowles conveyed his estate to Roger Hill and withdrew to Wells. Andrews died in 1637 and his widow, who had married Arthur Mackworth, of Casco, sold her interest to Peter Hill, father of Roger ; the premises were subsequently occupied by John Helson and William Dicer." *From "Pioneers on Maine Rivers": with lists to 1651. Spencer, Wilbur Daniel,. Portland, Me. Printed by Lakeside Print. Co.. 1992.*

The Wars

The General Court passed an order, directing the removal of forces from the stone fort at the falls to Winter Harbor, where a new fort was built on the extremity of the point at the entrance of the Pool. Three hundred pounds were appropriated for this object..... In 1710, one hundred pounds were granted by the court towards the completion of the fortification, which was called Fort Mary... In August of that year, about fifty French and Indians make an assault on Winter Harbor, killed a woman, and took two men, one of whom, Pendleton Fletcher, (was married to Sarah Hill, eldest daughter of Roger Hill) was captured for the fourth time. The garrison redeemed him..... *From History of Saco and Biddeford, George Folsom, Maine Historical Society, reprint of 1830 edition.*

"On a high point of land, just opposite the steamboat landing at Biddeford Pool, is Fort Hill, so called because a fortification was erected here in the early part of King William's War, which began in 1688 and lasted ten years. This fort was commanded by Captain John Hill, whose father (Roger Hill) settled near the mouth of the Saco River in 1653. This fort was the center of many thrilling scenes during the war. A military company was organized here and John Hill received from Thomas Danforth, deputy governor of Massachusetts, a commission as ensign of the company.

During the war, Ensign Hill distinguished himself in an engagement with the Indians, and as a reward for his heroic conduct was made lieutenant and subsequently captain. At first he had command of the twenty soldiers quartered at Saco and later, under command of Major Charles Frost, he went to South Berwick, where he met the major's daughter, Mary Frost, whom he married in 1694. The name of the fort was then changed to Fort Mary, in honor of his wife. During this war conditions became so distressing that many of the settlers were obliged to leave their homes and seek protection in the larger settlements west.

There was not sufficient room in the fort for entire families and it often happened that for weeks at a time, those who had gone from the fort were cut off from all communications with those left behind. During one of these enforced separations, Capt. Hill's mother remained at the fort with her son. In the attic of an old house in South Berwick, about eighty years ago, was found an old trunk which had been tucked away under the eaves and regarded as no value, until it happened to be opened and among its contents were found valuable letters and historical papers which have so close a connection with the old landmark under discussion that I make two of them a part of this article. At the time this letter was written Capt. Hill's father (Roger) had gone with other settlers to Wells. The letter was sent to

his wife, in care of Capt. John Hill, at Fort Mary, Saco, and is as follows:

"Wells, May 7, 1690



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Dear and Loving Wife:

*These are to let you know that we are all well here, blessed be God for it; and all our children remember their duty to you. The Indians have killed Goodman Frost and James Littlefield and carried away Nathaniel Frost, and burnt several houses here at Wells, and I would have our son, John Hill, hire a boat, if he can, to bring you and some of our things by water, for I fear it is not safe to come by land. Son John be as careful of your mother as possibly you can, for it is very dangerous times. The Lord only knows whether we shall ever see one another any more. Praying for your prosperity.
Your loving husband until death, Roger Hill"*

Fort Mary was the last stronghold for people in the vicinity, and as the war progressed and conditions became more alarming, there seemed to be fear that the whole Saco settlement would have to be abandoned.....

On the site of this old fort, Rebecca Emery Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, has erected a monument, built of stones gathered from the vicinity, set in cement, bearing on the front a bronze tablet suitably inscribed." *From Maine In History and Romance, by Members of the Maine Federation of Women's Clubs, Lewiston Journal Company, Publishers, Lewiston, Maine, Published 1915*

The number of soldiers in the garrison at Fort Mary, in February, 1699 was sixteen, including officers, viz. Capt. John Hill, Lt. Joseph, his brother, Corporal Ebenezer Hill, Pendleton Fletcher, nephew of the Hill, Thomas Harvey, Samuel Smith, Edmund Leverett, John Crocker, Benj. Mayers, Humphrey Deering, Shubael Henning, John Sweeting, Henry Taylor, Davis Jones, Mark Round and Jeffry Mercy, two thirds of whom, excluding the officers, could not write their names as appears by the payroll.



In November 1699, Capt. Hill, having served through the war over ten years-resolved to resign his commission and retire to private life. The Governor, in compliance with his request, granted him permission "to visit Boston to adjust his accounts" and in the following April received his resignation.

By his Excellency the Earl of Bellamont

"Whereas, upon your request to be discharged from his Majesty's service, I have thought fit to appoint and commissionate George Turfrey, Esq. Gen. To be captain of his Majesty's Fort Mary, at present under your command.

You are therefore hereby ordered, upon receipt hereof (which I send by Captain Turfrey) to surrender and deliver up to his the said Turfrey's charge and command the said Fort Mary, and all the guns, artillery, ammunition, stores, provisions and appurtenances thereunto belonging, and the soldiers now posted in garrison there; as also to deliver unto his custody all such Goods and Effects remaining unsold in your hands of what was committed to you for trade with the Indians. Taking the said Turfrey's receipt for what you shall deliver to him. Hereof fail not, for which this shall be your sufficient warrant. Any you are upon receipt hereof according discharged from his Majesty's service.

Given under my hand at Boston the eighth day of April 1700, and in the 12 years of his Majesty's reign.

*To Capt. John Hill
Commander of his Majesty's
Fort Mary at Saco*

Bellamont

Capt. John Hill removed from Saco to Berwick and built a house a quarter of a mile west of Great Works' falls. His brother-in-law, Ichabod Plaistad, resided between him and the falls. Mr. Hill followed the occupation of a planter and owned mills. (From Hill Family in Maine, Collections from Samuel A. Hill, unpublished.)

"It appears that during the war of 1689 the inhabitants were defended by several garrison houses and two forts. Of the various garrisons, one occupied by John Brown was on the Saco side of the river near where the York Saving Bank now stands. The ground in this locality was once much higher than it is at present and was formerly called Fort Hill. An historical bronze table now marks the site. Also designated by a plaque inserted in the brick wall of the Pepperell Mill on Main Street in Biddeford is the location of a government Stone Fort. This was attacked in the summer of 1703 and forced to capitulate after heavy losses were incurred on both sides. The few remaining inhabitants of the settlement fled to Parker's Neck at Winter Harbor, now Biddeford Pool, where on a bluff-like peninsular stood old Fort Mary, so prominently featured in John G. Whitter's poem "Mary Garvin":

*"The evening gun had sounded from gray Fort Mary's walls;
Through the forest, like a wild beast, roared and plunged the Saco's falls."*

".....During the uneasy peace days of 1707 there occurred one of those strange happenings unique in the annals of Indian warfare, which might be termed a naval battle between white and red men. In the fall of the year two fishing vessels manned by Captain Austin were lying the bay off the Pool. A watcher on Fort Hill noticed a long dark line of canoes creeping along the shoreline. From the fort a musket was fired to warn the fishermen of their danger. Finding that their retreat to the shore was cut off, they abandoned one sloop and the crews joined forces on the stouter and faster vessel. In the scant time at their disposal they barricaded the bulwarks with barrels, meanwhile keeping up a heavy fire on the enemy. The Indians were staggered by the barrage as many of their frail craft were riddled and sank, but still they came on with exultant shouts. Fortunately a brisk wind blew up and the fishing boat began to beat her way seaward with the Indians attempting to give chase in the abandoned sloop. But the savages proved to be just as ineffectual seamen as they were marksmen, and after three hours of battling they gave up the pursuit, having sustained heavy losses. The fishing crew lost but one man."

From The King's Highway from Portland to Kittery Stagecoach & Tavern Days on the Old Post Road, Herbert G. Jones, the Longfellow Press, Portland Maine, 1953