

## **ROGER CONANT AND THE TOWN OF SALEM.**

### **AND ROGER'S BROTHER CHRISTOPHER.**

There is another post for Roger back in February 2018.

Roger Conant 1592 – 1679 was a founder of Salem, Massachusetts. Conant arrived at Plymouth Colony from London about 1623, where he became associated with Puritan opposition, and subsequently led the settlement to outlying areas, including the site of an ancient Native American village and trading center.

Roger Conant was baptized in East Budleigh, Devonshire on April 9, 1592. He was the son of Richard Conant and Agnes Clarke. He would later move to London, where he became a drysalter.

There is a question as to what ship Roger and his family arrived in, Some historians claim that the ship was The Anne, but only Roger's brother Christopher Conant is listed as being on the Anne in 1623. In William Bradford's history, in addition to letters to him by the London Adventurers, mention is made of an unnamed master or journeyman salter who may have arrived in Plymouth in the Charity in March 1623/24. Some historians believe that Bradford may have been describing Roger Conant, and that he arrived in Plymouth in 1624.

In 1625, John Robinson, the long-time minister of their exiled congregation in Leiden, Netherlands died. Robinson had been the driving force behind all their efforts to find a better place than England to live their lives and it was he who cared for the many left at the Leiden congregation after the Mayflower's departure. Robinson's death caused Plymouth settlers began to lose the fervor that helped them survive the grim early years there and began to fear that all they had gained might eventually be destroyed. These dark thoughts turned into mean-spirited fanaticism. At about that time, John Lyford, a minister who had been sent over by the London Adventurers, was expelled from Plymouth for secretly meeting with settlers who wished to return to the type of worship that they had back in England. One of Lyford's supporters, John Oldham was forced to run a gauntlet while Pilgrims beat him with the butt-ends of their muskets. This punishment received the approval of Pilgrim leader Edward Winslow. The Adventurers were quite displeased over what had happened to one of their men and criticized the Pilgrims as "contentious, cruel and hard hearted, among your neighbors" Gov. Bradford later in his writings wrote that he thought that Lyford and Oldham deserved their punishments. These

actions against the rebellion of Lyford and Oldham were possibly the reason Roger Conant left Plymouth for other locations where he would later continue to be in association with them against the Plymouth authorities.

In the years prior to and also after John Robinson's death, Plymouth Colony had lost about a quarter of its residents. They had moved to other areas of New England or went back to England or to Virginia. Some, such as salter Roger Conant, found a place to work and worship peacefully in the fishing and trading outposts along the New England coast at Nantasket and Cape Ann.

Per historian Hubbard's General History, about 1624 Conant moved to Nantasket with his family and about a year or so later relocated to Cape Ann, at the north end of Massachusetts Bay.

In another case of the new Pilgrim vindictiveness, in 1625 Roger Conant was involved in a violent situation between Plymouth Colony military Captain Myles Standish and some fishermen on Cape Ann. Conant was so shocked by the violence the Plymouth captain displayed that Conant later reported the incident in detail for Pilgrim historian William Hubbard. In restating John Robinson's earlier concerns about the way the colony was turning to fanaticism and violence, Hubbard wrote, "Captain Standish... never entered the school of our Savior Christ...or, if he was ever there, had forgot his first lessons, to offer violence to no man." Hubbard also wrote about Standish; "so was the Plymouth captain, a man of very little stature, yet of a very hot and angry temper."

In 1626 Conant was chosen as the first governor of the English settlers at Salem and was replaced in 1628 by Gov. John Endicott..

Roger built the first Salem house on what is now Essex Street, opposite the Town Market. In 1630 he was chosen as freeman, or voting stockholder of the Massachusetts Bay Company. Conant was one of the first two Salem representatives to the colony's general court or legislature, and was repeatedly elected a selectman by the people of Salem. When the legislature granted communities the right to establish district courts, Roger Conant served on numerous Salem quarterly juries for sixteen years. He also was involved in civic activities over the years such as establishing town boundaries and laying out land grants.

In 1639, his signature was one of the first ones on the contract for enlarging the meeting house in Town Square for the First Church in Salem. This document remains a part of the town records at City Hall. Roger

Conant was active in the affairs of Salem throughout his life. During his very long lifetime Conant had a number of family tragedies, including the death of his wife Sarah, and of sons Caleb, Lot, Roger and Joshua. Only his son Exercise and possibly several daughters succeeded him.

Roger Conant and Sarah Horton married at St. Ann Blackfriars, London on November 11, 1618 and had at least 8 children. She was alive in November 1660 and may have died before March 1677/78 as she was not named in her father's will. Her burial place is unknown.

Children of Roger and Sarah Conant:

Sarah was baptized at St. Lawrence Jewry, London on September 19, 1619 and was buried there October 30, 1620.

Caleb was baptized at St. Lawrence Jewry, London on May 27, 1622. He died in England before November 11, 1633, when his uncle, John Conant, became administrator of his estate.

Lot was born about 1624 and died September 29, 1674. He married Elizabeth Walton and had ten children. After Lot's death, Elizabeth married (2) Andrew Mansfield in Lynn on January 10, 1681/82.

Roger was born in Salem and died in June 1672. He married Elizabeth Weston by 1661 and had two children.

Sarah was born about 1628. She married John Leach and had ten children.

Joshua was born about 1630 and died in England in 1659. He married Seeth Gardner by 1657 and had one son.

Mary was born about 1632. She married 1st John Balch about 1652 and had one daughter. She married 2nd William Dodge by 1663 and had five children.

Elizabeth was born about 1635 and was unmarried in March 1677/78. Nothing further is known.

Exercise was baptized in Salem on December 24, 1637 and died on April 28, 1722. He married Sarah Andrews by 1668 and had six children. He was buried in Olde Mansfield Center Cemetery, Mansfield

Roger Conant died on November 19, 1679 in what is now the city of Beverly in Essex County, Massachusetts. He was reportedly buried in Burying Point Cemetery in Salem.

Salem's Founder

Photo by Jim McAllister

Poor Roger Conant gets no respect.

Because of Salem's reputation as the "Witch City", and because Henry Kitson's bronze statue of the city's founding father stands in front of the salem witch museum, many visitors assume that the likeness of Conant as one respected magazine erroneously called it, that of a "determined sorceress"

Conant deserves better. it was his vision and faith that sowed the seeds of the new plantation at "this place called Naumkeake" in 1626, shortly after the demise of the English fishing settlement at Cape Ann. And it was Conant's tenacity and commitment- with probable encouragement from his wife, Sarah, who had just moved for the fourth time since leaving the comforts of London in 1623-that made the colony a success despite disease, depression and the powerful lure of the warmer Virginia climate. And it was Conant's decision to stay at Naumkeag and to cooperate with the settlers sent over by the Massachusetts Bay Company in 1628, even after the company replaced him as the legal head of the plantation, that gave the settlement it's new name: Salem, "city of peace".

#### Family Members - FIND A GRAVE MEMORIAL

##### Parents

Richard Conant

1548–1630

Agnes Clarke Conant

1548–1630

##### Spouse

Sarah Horton Conant

1598–1670 (m. 1618)

##### Children

Sarah Conant

1619–1620

Caleb Conant

1622–1633

Sarah Conant Leach

1623 – unknown

Lot Conant

1624–1674

Joanna Conant

1626 – unknown

Roger Conant

1628–1672

Joshua Conant

1630–1659

Elizabeth Conant

1635 – unknown

Exercise Conant

1636–1722

#### CHRISTOPHER CONANT

Brother of Roger. Probably arrived 1623 on the ship Anne.

Born about 1588 in London. Son of Roger and Agnes Clarke Conant.

Probably married twice in London. 1st to Sicily Croxan. 2nd to Mrs. Anne Walton. Both apparently died in England, before Christopher's arrival.

Children unknown.

Received 1 acre in Plymouth in 1623, indicating that he was then unmarried.

Grocer by trade.

No records post 1630. Maybe returned to England ?

He may have followed his brother Roger to Nantasket, then to Cape Ann, then to Naumkeag (Salem).

Wikipedia, Find A Grave, The Great Migration Begins