

John Harriman and the Battle of Bloody Brook

LEONARD HARRIMAN'S LOST SON

By Stephen Gauss



For the Harriman Family Association

Meeting at the 375th anniversary of the town of Rowley

They were “the flower of Essex”, the finest men of Essex County, Massachusetts Bay Colony, sent by their fathers to defend the towns of Western Massachusetts from the savages. Or they were “a rabble in arms”, the poor, the criminal and the outsiders, conscripted by the town fathers to keep the Indians from advancing into their towns. But they were all gone – massacred at Deerfield in 1675 by the Indians at the Battle of Bloody Brook. Among those slain was John Harriman of Rowley, the eldest son of Leonard and Margaret Harriman, among the earliest families of the town first called Ezechi Rogers Plantation.

Reverend Ezekial Rogers and his band of followers arrived from England around 1638 and Leonard Harriman was either with him or joined his band shortly after. Rogers was granted land for a town between Newbury and Ipswich and named it for his home in England. Within a few years Rowley was among the most prominent towns in Massachusetts. Leonard, a weaver, seems to have prospered, too, as shown by account books indicating that he was one of the major customers at Pearson’s fulling mill, taking his cloth there to be finished. Presumably, sometime before 1650 Leonard married Margaret, whose family name is unknown, and on 16 May 1650 their first child, son John, was born – the first Harriman born in Massachusetts. They went on to have four more children.

John Harriman probably helped his father with his looms and would have been learning that trade while he grew, as was common at the time. It appears that John married sometime around 1674. No record has been found of this marriage. But at the Quarterly Court held at Hampton on 13 October 1674, “John Heriman (sic) and his wife, convicted for fornication and confessing, were ordered to be whipped, he twenty stripes and she fifteen, or pay a fine of 8li.”¹ Until 1679 all that area of Massachusetts and New Hampshire near the present day border was contained in Old Norfolk County, Massachusetts Bay, and parties in these court records could have been from any town in that jurisdiction, including towns now in either state. Court sessions were held in a rotation at different towns within the jurisdiction (Hampton [now in New Hampshire],

¹ Li was used as a symbol for pound, deriving from the French livre. Outside of quotation, the pound symbol will be used here for clarity.

and Salisbury, Salem, and Ipswich, for example).² Since John and his wife were convicted of fornication in the quarter court term of October 1674, a child had been born before that date – that was the proof to the court. The marriage also had to have occurred six months or less prior to the child's birth – so we can assume the child was born between the July term and the October term of 1674 and that the marriage occurred after January 1673/4.³ No other record of a marriage or of a child born to John has been found. A surviving child should have been mentioned in the will of John's father, Leonard. He left his arms and ammunition to his seventeen year-old grandson, Matthew, Jr., and the child of John would have been about the same age.

It is also curious that the fine was so high. In all other cases in the same court in that time period, the fine was in the £4-6 range. In one case where the two were fined separately, the man's fine was £4 and the woman's was 40s. In each case where a whipping was offered as an alternative, the amount was 10 or 15 stripes for the man, never 20, and 10 stripes for the woman, never 15. This could indicate that they denied the accusation, but it seems out of line with other such cases.

As John grew to adulthood the towns grew and the people prospered. But as the coastal towns expanded they came more and more into conflict with the Native Americans over territory. In the summer of 1675 the Wampanoag chief, Metacomet, known as King Philip, began a series of raids in the Plymouth Plantation.⁴ The English countered and the conflict spread into the Connecticut River Valley.

Until this time encounters with the Indians in the Massachusetts Bay Colony had been skirmishes and had been fought with mostly volunteers from Boston, Suffolk and Middlesex counties. By now, though, it had become clear that a) with Indian raids throughout New England this was not going to be a short one-time battle and b) volunteers were not going to supply enough men for a major campaign. In June 1673 the General Court had sent notice: "You

² Records and files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, p. 408.

³ Personal communication to the author from Melinde Lutz Byrne [Sanborn], author of *Lost Babes: Fornication Abstracts from Court Records, Essex County, Massachusetts, 1692-1745*, 9 July 2013.

⁴ Note that at this time Massachusetts Bay included what was later Maine, but not the Plymouth Colony.

are hereby required in his Majesty's name to take notice that the Gov. and Council have ordered 100 able soldiers forthwith impressed out of the severall townes... ."⁵ King Philip's War was the first true military emergency in Massachusetts Bay; there had been previous minor incidents and skirmishes, but nothing on this scale.

A Rabble In Arms by Kyle Zelner is a very readable and interesting study of the impressments of men from Essex County into the militia to counter this threat from the Indians. Rowley was an important center of textiles and one of the more prosperous towns,⁶ but Ipswich was the most populous and provided most of the men for the militia. For the most part they were neither volunteers nor professional soldiers, but men selected from the lower classes or undesirable in some other way. They might be criminals, "strangers" (men from out of town), or even politically incorrect. The Major of the county regiment determined what proportion each town should supply and informed the town militia committees of their responsibility. Those committees then decided who would be impressed. Analysis by Zellner shows that the preference was for single men over married and criminals, transients or other undesirables over upright citizens. They preferred to select sons of townspeople who were not prominent or wealthy or the younger sons of families (the eldest son would usually inherit the farm, so was not selected). There also seems to be a clear preference for choosing the sons of so-called latecomers – that is those who were not among the town founders. There was considerable concern that the people had wandered from the religious precepts of their forefathers and in 1675 the General Court promulgated new rules including those against blasphemy, unlawful oaths and scandalous acts.

"In August 1675 Rowley's committee of militia summoned nine men to serve with Captain Lathrop in the Connecticut River Valley."⁷ Thomas Lathrop came to Salem from England and settled

⁵ George M. Boge, *Soldiers in King Philip's War* (Boston:author, 1891), p. 3.

⁶ Kyle F. Zelner, *A Rabble In Arms: Massachusetts Towns and Militiamen in King Philip's War* (NY and London: New York University Press, 2009); Chapter 2, Rowley; google books and Kindle book from Amazon.com, p71., Chapter 3, "Rowley: Essex County's Thriving Textile Town."

⁷ Zelner, p. 100.

in Beverly where he became its first selectman. When the militia were formed in Essex County, Lathrop was placed in command.

It seems possible that John Harriman was impressed into the militia either because he was not of a first family or because of his conviction of fornication putting him in the less desirable (criminal) class. He was a married man and his father's status in the community as a well-off weaver and home owner should have prevented him from being selected. While not necessarily wealthy, Leonard Harriman was an important customer of the fulling mill,⁸ which placed him in the upper economic and social levels into which Rowley was stratified. Zelner places the families in several categories and John Harriman is squarely in the socio-economic middle – families in the county of average wealth and holding occasional town offices and labeled “Middling.” His father, Leonard, is ranked 48 of 85 on the tax list⁹ and having 5½ gates. The latter were rights to land on the town common for grazing – probably sheep – and indicated the wealth of a family. Only three families listed had more gates, placing Leonard at the top of the “Middling” class. Since most of the impressed men were from this Middling class, it appears that the committee in Rowley did NOT discriminate in the way that Ipswich and others did on an economic basis. However, few of the founding families sent sons to war and the Harrimans were considered “Latecomers.” Leonard probably lived in the town, but did not own property until he bought the Spofford place on Bradford Street in 1667.

There was at the same time a religious schism in the community pitting the supporters of two ministers against each other. Rowley supported both a pastor, initially Ezekiel Rogers and then Samuel Shepherd followed by his brother, Jeremiah Shepherd, and a teaching minister, Samuel Philips. Some wanted to remove Shepherd and the town became divided into two camps.¹⁰ If that was a reason for his impressment, then John Harriman was on the side against Shepherd, as the majority of those impressed were from that faction supported by two of the three committeemen and wanting to keep Shepherd. However, there is a list of those

⁸ Amos Everett Jewett and Emily Mabel Adams Jewett, *Rowley, Massachusetts, "Mr. Ezechi Rogers plantation," 1639-1850*, (Rowley, MA., 1946).

⁹ John Pearson was ranked first and owned the fulling mill where we know that Leonard took his cloth to be “fulled” or finished. See HFA newsletter XXII:1 (March 2008).

¹⁰ Zelner, p. 99.

opposing Shepherd and no Harrimans are on it. Zelner expresses little doubt that the losers in the controversy took revenge by sending more of the sons of the winners off to war. However, the final resolution of the schism did not occur until November 1675 after the battle at Bloody Brook.

The muster records show few men volunteering for service. However, those that did were largely second or lower sons, who would not receive much inheritance from their father. John Harriman was the eldest son, so would have no incentive of this sort to volunteer. However, it is possible that he joined the militia in disgrace to leave Rowley and his (possibly) illegitimate family behind. Or was it that his wife and child had died, possibly in childbirth, and he joined the militia voluntarily to get away. No record has ever been found of his wife and child other than the court record noted previously. That is the basis for his status as a married man in Zelner's work.¹¹ Of the seven married men from Essex County killed in this campaign, five died at Bloody Brook. Of these, two were from Rowley – John Harriman and Thomas Lever.¹² After this experience no more married men were taken from Rowley.¹³

On August 2, 1675, Captain Edward Hutchinson left Brookfield with his men to meet with King Philip's band, the Wampanoags, who had joined with the local Nipmuck Indians. The meeting was to be in a field near the Indian village of Meminimisset. "When the Indians did not appear, Hutchinson, Captain Thomas Wheeler and their men continued on into a narrow valley where they were suddenly ambushed by as many as 300 Indians."¹⁴ Suffering casualties the soldiers escaped and returned to Brookfield, where they gathered the 76 townsfolk into one of the largest and strongest houses. There they watched for three days as the Indians burned the town. On August 4 a body of soldiers arrived and the Indians left. "Many of the civilians fled to Hadley and the attack marked the beginning of the major part of King Philip's War."¹⁵ On August 4

¹¹ Private communication to Gauss from Zelner, 25 July 2013.

¹² Zelner, Ch. 3, endnote 89. Probably Leaver, m. Damaris Balley May 8, 1672. Damaris died "an old widow" Mar 1, 1731, born in 1648 so age 83 His father, Thomas Leaver, was the town clerk.

¹³ Zelner, Chapter 3, "Rowley: Essex County's Thriving Textile Town."

¹⁴ Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley including the Early History of Hatfield, South Hadley, Amherst and Granby Massachusetts*; introduction by George Sheldon (Springfield, Mass.: H. R. Hunting & Company, 1905); Chapter XIV, p130ff. Internet library at archive.org.

¹⁵ Judd, p 132.

or 5 the militia council received word of the battle at Brookfield and gathered a militia company under Captain Thomas Lathrop of Beverly to go to their relief arriving there on August 7¹⁶ and it was with this group that John Harriman arrived in the wilds of Western Massachusetts.

For several weeks they explored the countryside for signs of the Indians but found no evidence of them and concluded that they had all gone north to Paquayag (now Athol). Some of the Connecticut troops returned home, others were sent to Northfield and on August 23 Captains Lathrop and Beers and their men went to Hadley.

By August 24 the English had decided that there had been too many incidents with the Indians and that there were numerous signs that they were preparing for war. Captains Lathrop and Beers crossed the river into Hatfield and marched down toward the encampment while the Northampton men marched up from Hadley in an attempt to persuade them to turn in their arms. However, the Indians had fled and when the soldiers pursued them they were fired upon. They “lost six men upon the ground, though one was shot in the back by our own men”¹⁷ – friendly fire. Nothing more happened until skirmishes on September 1 with the attacks becoming more fierce later in the week. Captain Beers was killed in fighting near Squakheag (Northfield). On the 5th a relief column under Major Treat was sent, but he determined to remove the people from the garrison and Squakeag was abandoned and they returned to Hadley. On the 12th an assault was made on Pocumtuck (Deerfield). As a result some volunteers from Deerfield and Hadley along with soldiers of Captain Lathrop’s company joined the garrison at Deerfield. The next day they went out to the hill where the Indians were camped,¹⁸ but they had all fled. At the same time Captain Mosely and his men arrived in Hadley.

On September 18, 1675 Captain Lathrop set out from Hadley with a company of about 70 men to guard a shipment of grain and

¹⁶ George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip’s War Being A Critical Account of That War with a Concise History of the Indian Wars of New England From 1620-1677* (Leominster, Mass.:Bodge, 1896), p128; Internet library archive.org.

¹⁷ Letter of Rev. Solomon Stoddard to Increase Mather quoted in Judd, p 133.

¹⁸ “The hill is now a conspicuous object in Deerfield meadow.” – Judd, p 136.

supplies from Deerfield. Deerfield had, by then, been abandoned, but the stores were needed in Hadley and the other towns still garrisoned. Accounts vary but most agree that as the heavily laden wagon train left Deerfield and slowly crossed the stream known as Muddy Brook, the soldiers either placed their weapons on the wagons while helping to get them across the stream or they stopped to pick grapes growing alongside the path. Suddenly hundreds of Indians appeared and a fierce battle began. All but a handful of the men were killed including the teamsters of the wagons. The Indians stripped the bodies of their clothes, but the attack was heard by Captain Mosely and Major Treat who rushed their large company to the scene. But they were too late to offer much assistance to the men from Hadley.

The next day the 64 men killed were buried in a mass grave at the site of the battle. The exact number killed is unclear - supposedly only 7 or 8 of Lathrop's men escaped and some are named in petitions to the General Court. The "List of Men slain in the County of Hampshire" by Rev. John Russell of Hadley, Mass., was reprinted in full in Everts' *History of the Connecticut Valley*¹⁹ in the section on Deerfield by George Sheldon. He noted that he had added the towns from which they came where possible. In July 1884 the Reverend Bodge²⁰ recorded 59 names.²¹ Both lists contain the name of John Harriman of Rowley. Russell listed a total of 71 men slain, about 40 of them being Lathrop's men, including Lathrop himself. Some of the slain were teamsters, so some of the discrepancy is between soldiers and civilians. Names of the survivors of the battle were gathered by Bodge and others from witnesses and petitions to the General Court after the massacre and do not include John Harriman's name. He is noted as deceased and due payment of 1£ 18s 6d for service in at least two lists.

Since the time of the massacre the little stream running peacefully to the Connecticut River has been called Bloody Brook.

¹⁹ *History of the Connecticut Valley in Massachusetts* (Philadelphia: Louis H. Everts, 1879), 2:592; Internet library archive.org.

²⁰ George Madison Bodge, NEHGR 38:332 (1884). Apparently his book was composed of these articles published in the Register.

²¹ Bodge, p 136.

The Reverend Increase Mather wrote an account of the battle at Bloody Brook²² that was “a hurried performance; written out as the news arrived at the capital from the forest in which the war operations were performed.” The war ended in the fall of 1676 and by the end of that year Mather’s account was in circulation even in London.²³ William Hubbard of Ipswich was preparing his own account at the same time²⁴ which was widely reprinted, but later editions contained numerous errors.

Zelner concluded that Captain Lathrop’s company was composed of 68 men from Essex County and that 66% of them had a black mark against them.²⁵ William Hubbard writing about the massacre shortly afterward called Lathrop’s men “the very Flower of the County of Essex” and Zelner writes that his own work “put to rest the famous boast” of Hubbard. “Lathrop’s men ... were often town ‘undesirables’ whose loss would not damage the town. They were not the sons of the county’s best families.” Yet, if John Harriman’s only crime was that he and his wife had relations before their marriage, it would seem that these men were not all the villains that we are lead to believe. Perhaps many were more of a “town problem” rather than having a criminal past and these are all lumped together. Some of the “rabble” may simply been on the wrong political side or not sufficiently conforming to the morals of the church.

²² Samuel G. Drake, editor and notes, *The History of King Philip’s War, By the Rev. Increase Mather, D.D. Also, a History of the Same War, By the Rev. Cotton Mather, D.D.* (Albany: Samuel Drake, 1862;) p88; google books. From the preface by the editor: Mather’s account was “a hurried performance; written out as the news arrived at the capital from the forest in which the war operations were performed.” The war ended in the fall of 1676 and by the end of that year Mather’s account was in circulation even in London. William Hubbard was preparing his own account at the same time and it was a race to see whose could be published first. Drake notes that Hubbard’s work may have originally been the more accurate, but through seven editions many errors and omissions were introduced; the third edition in 1775 was badly mutilated and all later editions are bad copies of that. The work of Cotton Mather was done 20 years after the war and is much less accurate. It also uses much material from Hubbard.

²³ Drake, from the preface.

²⁴ Hubbard, William, *A Narrative of the Indian Wars in New England* (Brattleboro: Fessenden, 1814) reprinted from the 1677 text.. P108 and Hubbard, William, *The History of the Indian Wars in New England, from the first settlement to the termination of the war with King Philip in 1677.* Ed. By Samuel Gardner Drake, 1864.

²⁵ Philip Ranlet, Review, *Journal of American History*, March 2010 96:4 p1157; “Zelner convincingly demonstrates that the most unreliable historian of New England, William Hubbard, was not dealing with historical facts when he wrote ...” that the men were the flower of Essex. Zelner “remains objective even when dealing with controversial matters...”.

On September 30, 1835²⁶ a commemoration of the battle was held to raise money for a new monument with over 6,000 in attendance. The principal speaker was Edward Everett, the noted orator and governor-elect of Massachusetts. He is most noted for his speech at the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery after which he told President Lincoln that he hoped he had come as near to the point in two hours as Lincoln did in two minutes. In 1838 the current monument was completed to replace the crude monument that had been previously erected. In an address by Luther Lincoln²⁷ the history of the battle was reviewed and the details of the monument were spelled out. From his remarks it is apparent that there was some resistance to replacing the original marker with the new one. By this time there was also some criticism of Captain Lathrop for allowing his men to be so careless in such a dangerous location. Lincoln admits it to have been a “gross oversight”, but also notes similar errors by other great men, such as the “veteran Braddock.”

Today the monument stands in a patch of land at the turning of the road and within feet of Bloody Brook. The original slab marker lies at the site of the mass grave in the front yard of 99 North Main Street. Here John Harriman’s remains lie. The first Harriman born in Massachusetts is buried with his fellow soldiers – “the flower of Essex County.”

²⁶ Edward Everett, *An Address Delivered at Bloody Brook, in South Deerfield, September 30, 1835, in commemoration of the fall of the “Flower of Essex,” at that spot, in King Philip’s War, September 18, (O.S.) 1675* (Boston: Russell, Shattuck, & Williams, 1835), google books.

²⁷ Luther Lincoln, *An address delivered at South Deerfield, August 31, 1838, on the completion of the Bloody Brook monument, erected in memory of Capt. Lothrop and his associates*, (Greenfield, Mass.:Kneeland & Eastman, 1838), on-line at archive.org.



Figure 1 - The monument of 1838



Figure 2 – “The same of the slain is marked by a stone slab 21 rods southerly of this monument.”



Figure 3 – “Grave of Cap^t Lathrop and Men Slain by the Indians 1675”



Figure 4 - Bloody Brook today