

AN HISTORIC SKETCH

OF

COXET

AND

THE RICHMOND FAMILY

BY

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Property of Philip M. Mendenhall



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In the southwest corner of Westport is a triangular tract, bounded west by Little Compton, east by the Westport River and extending from Adamsville to the sea. Originally it was part of Seconet which became Little Compton, but in 1741 when the Imperial Decree changed the boundary between Massachusetts and Rhode Island this triangle was annexed to Dartmouth.

Devoll's Pond was first called Cockeset, then Cockeast and finally from the Indian name of the Pond the region was designated Coxet.

While the English inhabitants were increasing in the adjoining towns this remote section, before 1700, was the home of a remnant of the tribe of Indians that

helped the white men in the war with King Philip. In fact, there is evidence that the Indian that shot Philip lived in this region a short distance north of the Abraham Manchester Farm. His name was "Alderman" and he was a Seconet Indian. Seconet Neck included Coxet. After the war an "Indian in Seconet named Isaac who had been of great service to the English and had shown considerable interest in religion" received the privilege of using a gun. In 1683 in the deed to Daniel Wilcox of land on the West Arm of the River about one mile and a half north of the sea, the west boundary was "land of Alderman". Later he is called Isaac the Indian Preacher, and about 1700 he had died. Unless there is shown some positive fact to the contrary,

it seems reasonably sure that all these records relate to the same man.

Well known in all the country round before 1700 was a restless Yankee trader named Daniel Wilcox who exhibited all those qualities that characterize that class of early New England population.

His landed possessions in Dartmouth, Seconet, Pocasset and Freetown were extensive, and so were his family. He understood the language of the Indians and no doubt had increased his riches by his intercourse with the Redmen. It was a law of the Colony and Province that no Englishman should purchase land from the Indians without first having received permission from the Government. This was intended not only to prevent unconscionable bargains with the Aborigines, but to avoid that conflict that

might result if there were rival claimants to the land, some claiming under title from the Indians and the others from the English King. In Rhode Island the only title recognized came direct from the sachems, but in Massachusetts the title from the English Government was held to be necessary and primary, although deeds from the Indians were also desirable. Soon after the King Philip war longing eyes were directed towards Coxet. About 1680 the officials of Plymouth granted to Thomas Hinckley two hundred acres to be assigned to him on the east side of Seconet Neck. But for some years no steps were taken to have the same laid out and surveyed. In the meantime appeared the Yankee trader. Whether he sought a grant from Plymouth and was refused is not cer-

tain, but Wilcox decided to buy some of this territory direct from the Indian occupants. In 1688 he obtained a deed of one hundred acres from the chief Mamanuet on the west side of the Westport River about a mile north from the sea, bounded north and west by land of Isaac Alderman, an Indian Preacher. The purchase became known and Wilcox was arrested, but for some reason not apparent his case was not pressed for trial, possibly because he did not for several years record his deed. But in 1690 Hinckley undertook to have his two hundred acres measured out to him and when his agents went to Coxet Wilcox succeeded in stirring up the Indians and a tumult was aroused against Hinckley and such an uncomfortable experience did they have that they were forced to withdraw. For this performance

Wilcox was arrested, taken to Plymouth and placed under bonds.

In 1693 Wilcox procured a second deed of land between Quicksand Pond and Cockeset, now Devoll's Pond, and from the sea north to the Indian fence across the Neck. The deed was drawn with all the skill of some artful pleader, under the shrewd and ingenious supervision of Daniel Wilcox. The Grantor, the son of the former Indian chief, recited that in times past he and his ancestors had been in great distress and need and there was none to help. In such dire necessity Wilcox had been a friend and helper, and had rendered great and valuable services and had placed the Indians under great obligations and they thereby became indebted to him in large amounts and were anxious to repay the debt. But all

the commodity of value which they could transfer to him was land and so to discharge the debt and to pay the obligation the Indian accordingly conveyed the land, it being his only course. So the deed was executed and delivered and with the former deed was placed on record. The pathetic argument in the deal had no effect on the Puritans and Wilcox was promptly arrested, convicted and sentenced to pay a fine of 150 pounds, and as he could or would not comply with the order he was incarcerated in the county jail at Bristol. There was evidently among the people some dissatisfaction in relation to the sentence, and threats appeared that the jail would be forced open and Wilcox liberated. The sheriff, Capt. Gallup, was ordered to transport the prisoner to Boston and in

the attempt Wilcox escaped into Rhode Island and remained there nearly ten years as the authorities refused to surrender him to the officers from Massachusetts. The affair was finally adjusted by Wilcox by transferring to the Massachusetts Province some land in Tiverton along the Stafford Road. In his will Daniel Wilcox gave the Coxet land to his son John, but there is no evidence that any further claim was made under the Wilcox title until about 1897. Edward Howland of Little Compton, a descendant of Wilcox became possessed with the idea that the title of Daniel was valid and as an heir he proceeded to enforce the claim against the residents of Coxet by destroying their buildings. This, however, was met by determined resistance and Howland's death quieted the strange demand. It seems

beyond explanation that Howland should attempt to revive a claim that had remained dormant for over two centuries.

It was inevitable in 1700 that the title from Plymouth Colony would be sustained and hence the immediate descendants of Wilcox asserted no claim to Coxet. But Hinckley and John Rogers, John Bradford and William Southworth, to whom the title passed, together with William Peabody, Joseph Church and Edward Richmond, who purchased the lands along the Westport River, proceeded to enjoy their property. Having established their grants from Plymouth, these men then followed the universal custom and next obtained deeds from the Indians in occupation. The strip along the river called Curaest, and later Barker's Neck, lying east of Devoll's Pond and the brook

that flows into it, in 1694 was conveyed by Mamanewa, the Indian, to William Payboie, Joseph Church and Edward Richmond, all residents of Little Compton. They divided the same into lots and sold them to various persons.

In 1700 three Indians, Jonotus and Sue Codimonk, his sister, and Sam Pacachus, for 120 pounds sold Stephen's Neck of 300 acres to John Rogers and William Southworth. This included the land between Quicksand Pond and Devoll Pond and from the sea north to the lands of Isaac Alderman, Indian Preacher.

In 1697 John Bradford conveyed to Sylvester Richmond for 146 pounds silver money one half of Nottinuck Neck, bounded westerly by Quicksand Pond, south by the

sea and east by a little pond and the brook that runs into it. This is the section in later years called Stephen's Neck. Richmond there built the house west of Simon's Brook, owned by Peleg Manchester and taken down in 1866.

The Richmond family was wealthy and prominent. They engaged in the political and military affairs of the day and achieved distinction. Sylvester Richmond was a Colonel and was called "gentleman", Perez Richmond was a Captain and Sylvester Jr., was a Colonel.

In 1747 Perez Richmond purchased from Isaac Crocker and wife, Indians, 40 acres which was probably the north part of the farm of Abraham Manchester. The next year Perez purchased of Roger Richmond land south of the Crocker place. For

this he paid 400 pounds and this price leads to the inference that the place included buildings, although none are mentioned. From indications in later conveyances it seems certain that Perez had a house on this land at this date, built by himself or his brother Roger. It may have been the old part of the Abraham Manchester house.

The will of Sylvester Richmond contains some items of interest. It was probated in 1752.

To grandson Joshua he gave his "brace of pistols".

To grandson Sylvester he gave his "silver-hilted sword".

To grandson Sylvester he gave his "fire lock gun and three halberds."

To his negroes Nat and Kate "their freedom".

The land which he obtained from James Dyer passed to his son Sylvester.

His homestead he gave to his son Perez. So, as will hereafter appear, the territory west of the road that passes Asa Howland's house as far west as Quicksand Pond, in 1752 belonged to Capt. Perez Richmond. It is not certain how soon he changed his dwelling, but when he did his house was west of Stephens or Simons Brook. He died in 1770 and left an interesting will. He bequeathed "a great looking-glass; Japanned table; bannister backed chairs; riding chair with harness and tackling belonging to it and two slaves".

In tracing the ownership of the larger tracts in Coxet, it will be convenient to consider it in four strips:

1. Barker's Neck between Devoll Pond

and its Brook and the Westport
River.

2. Between this Pond and Brook and
the road by Asa Howland's.
3. Between this Road and Simons
Brook.
4. West to Quicksand Pond.

BARKER'S NECK.

It has already been explained that in
1694 Mamanewa, Indian, conveyed to William
Paybodie, Joseph Church and Edward Richmond
the south part of Curaest Neck, adjoining
the West Arm called the Harbor's Mouth and
extending north to an old ditch that runs
across the Neck, and bounded west by a
small Pond. These men were the leading cit-
izens and proprietors of Little Compton.

Having already procured the English title in 1692 they divided Barker's Neck into upland lots of ten acres each and meadow lots of three acres, and the same were sold to different individuals. Those in the south end of the Neck were owned in the Palmer family and their lands in 1831 were purchased by Philip Grinnell and comprised sixty acres. Westport Harbor village is within this tract which extended to the westward between Devoll's Pond and the Ocean.

That part of Barker's Neck north of the Grinnell farm about 1800 was purchased from the various owners by Major Sylvester Brownell and in 1852 his grandson, Richmond Brownell, sold the same to Gideon B. Peckham.

SECTION BETWEEN
DEVOLL POND AND ROAD BY ASA HOWLAND'S.

This is on the east edge of Stephen's Neck and belonged to the Richmond family. In 1786 it was sold to Benjamin Devoll and in 1825 to Job Davis. In the deed dated 1771 from Sylvester to Nathaniel Richmond is mentioned a house, and this is probably the dwelling now standing on the portion of the farm owned after 1847 by Robert Potter.

Next north of the Davis farm is a tract which Perez Richmond in 1770 devised to his son Joshua. Benjamin Sowle purchased it in 1795 and Benjamin Devoll in 1804. The south part of this farm was owned by Patience Devoll and went to her brother Holder Potter who in 1847 sold it to Robert Potter.

The north half of the Devoll farm

passed to Sylvester Brownell and it was included in his grandson's deed to Gideon B. Peckham in 1852.

BETWEEN THE ROAD BY
ASA HOWLAND'S HOUSE AND RICHMOND'S POND.

The south end of this section is the Howland farm and was owned by the Richmonds until 1792 Thomas B. Richmond sold to Sylvester Brownell. 1817 Edward Manchester owned it and in 1837 it was purchased by William Howland and is still owned in that family.

The farm north of the Howlands is known as the Abraham Manchester farm. This is part of the west half of the neck which in 1700 was conveyed to John Rogers by William Southworth. Sylvester Richmond married the daughter of Rogers and so a great part, if

not the whole, passed into the Richmond family. In 1743 Roger Richmond conveyed to Perez Richmond for 400 pounds the south part of this farm. Then in 1747, Isaac Crocker and wife, Indians, sold to Perez Richmond the forty acres north. The inference is quite sound that in the Roger Richmond section was a house which had been built a few years before. In 1770 Perez Richmond died, as already mentioned, leaving his homestead farm to his two sons, Edward and Perez Richmond.

In August 1773 the two sons joined in a deed to Pardon Brownell for 359 pounds of 95 acres, bounded north by land of Jonathan Brownell, east by land of Jonathan and George Brownell and Joshua Richmond, south and west by land of Ichabod Richmond and Sylvester Richmond.

The price indicates the presence of a house and it was not the house where Perez Richmond lived at his death because a year later when Edward and Perez divided the rest of the homestead farm they specifically divided the house also and it was west of Simons Brook. In 1792 Pardon Brownell for 615 pounds sold the same farm to Joseph Brownell. In 1829 it was conveyed by Joseph Brownell's grandchildren to Abraham Manchester.

In the deed from the Richmond Brothers to Pardon Brownell in 1773 there were two exceptions:

1. The Indian Burial place.
2. A small piece of land walled in for a watering place on the west side of the farm.

In the later deeds neither is mentioned.

The house on this farm is an interesting study. It faces south and was built at three periods. The west end was built by Captain Forbes W. Manchester, the present occupant, not many years ago. This addition covered the west half of the part west of the front door, and the main chimney was built about one hundred years ago, or before the time when the farm was sold by Pardon Brownell to Joseph. There are mostly modern size standard brick in the chimney and in that part of the house next west of the chimney is an absence of ancient framework. The arrangement of the great north kitchen, nearly spanning both front rooms is a style in vogue after the Revolution and before 1800. It is safe to infer that from 1784 to 1792 Pardon Brownell



added a west end to the house and built a new chimney. The east end presents an interesting problem. Here was an ancient structure. This part was originally two full stories in height as shown by the corner posts with bracketed tops. The corner frame work seems to be before 1750. The summers down stairs and in chamber run from chimney to the end of the house according to the Rhode Island method. Originally summers and girts were in sight, but probably when the house was rebuilt they were encased. The walls and ceilings are plastered. Down stairs the outer end of the summer which is on the east end has decayed to such an extent that the timber has settled nearly an inch. The cellar is under the east end of the house. Up stairs are some old doors trimmed in

ancient style. The rafters seem to be of one period. Collar beams and rafters are of hewed oak and sound. They were probably placed there when the house was rebuilt. Across the attic floor is a section two feet wide where the boards have been cut. The object was to take out this section to repair a girt, which was accomplished by putting in a new cross timber, as appeared by a recent examination. It follows from this that the frame of this east end, not including the roof, is older than the date when the house was rebuilt.

In my opinion in the present state of information, the chimney, roof and part of the house west of the front door were built by Pardon Brownell just before 1792.

There is some record evidence concerning the east end, which though slight, may guide to the right conclusion.

Captain Perez Richmond in his will in 1770 speaks of his "now" dwelling house, showing that he had lived in another house which was then standing. It also appears that his "now" dwelling house stood west of Simons Brook and had an old and new part according to the division made in 1774. His father, Sylvester Richmond, in his will gave his homestead farm and "now" dwelling house to son Perez; so in 1752 Sylvester on his farm had two houses and in 1770 Perez had two. Here is presented a question to decide which was on the Abraham Manchester farm. The best theory seems to be that Sylvester or Roger Richmond between 1730

and 1740 built the Manchester house and Sylvester erected one west of the Brook. At his death both were owned by Perez, his son, and the latter added the new part to the house west of the Brook.

The descriptions given in the early deeds do not furnish clearly defined bounds and it is not certain exactly where the different farm lines ran. But the evidence points to the conclusion that the east end of the Manchester house was built by Roger Richmond or Sylvester before 1740; but the records do not enable one to judge more definitely.

BETWEEN SIMONS BROOK AND QUICKSAND POND.

At his death in 1770 this was owned by Captain Perez Richmond and was devised to

his sons, Edward and Perez. In 1774 they divided the same, the north part being received by Edward and the rest by Perez. The south end which was taken by Perez comprised 150 acres and in 1825 was divided into small parcels and allotted to his heirs. This 1774 division line began at a point in Simons Brook 120 feet north of Richmond's Pond and extended westerly to Quicksand Pond. The homestead buildings were divided independently of the land. The house had a new and old part and the line of division gave the east end to one and the west end to the other.

This house was owned by Peleg Manchester and later by Zephaniah Borden and was taken down about 1888.

In 1831 the south half of this farm of

150 acres came into possession of William Manchester and was then sold in smaller parcels, the principal portion being owned as follows:

- 1853. James Chase and Edmund S. Sisson.
- 1855. Richard Borden.
- 1857. Cornelius H. Springer.
- 1865. Charles Jenkins.
- 1870. Elihu C. Hathaway.
- 1886. Annjanette Manchester, wife of Albert D. Manchester.

Since this date the farm has been somewhat subdivided.

In 1777 Edward Richmond conveyed his interest, which was the north half, to Dr. William Whitridge, who in 1825 sold the most of the farm to Gideon Tompkins. In 1830 on the east side he sold a tract to

Peleg Manchester and in 1855 the latter to Zephaniah Borden, 75 acres. A part passed to Thomas G. Tompkins. The house originally on this farm was probably built by Sylvester Richmond, possibly before 1700 when he first settled in this region. Additions were made to it and it was taken down in 1866.

Edward and Perez Richmond, in the deed of 1773 to Pardon Brownell, reserved the old Indian Burial Ground on the north side of the farm and their descendants are still the owners of that lot. Possibly this arrangement was made to fulfil a promise given to the Redmen when it was evident that their race was doomed to disappear from the land and they requested some friend among the English to secure and preserve their last resting place. So this

Indian Cemetery remains marked and respected, one of the very few whose tenure is fixed and established by the records.

So after two centuries the name of the famous Richmond family, that settled this region, owned and occupied the whole of Stephen's Neck, is no longer found among the residents. They were gentlemen and soldiers who stood high in civil and military affairs of the colonists, yet the only trace of their name remaining in this locality is the designation of a little body of salt water called

RICHMOND'S POND.