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HERALDRY IN AMERICA.

It may seem a contradiction of terms to speak of so aristocratic an institution as heraldry as being of interest or value to democratic Americans; but a little reflection will show us how this science will be of vast importance to our genealogists.

Coats-of-arms may be divided into three classes,—first, those belonging to any man's ancestors, and used by them for a long time. This is the most important class, and in most cases the original cause of the adoption of the arms is not to be discovered, and we must trust to the strictness with which this privilege was formerly guarded, for a guarantee that the arms were justly appropriated.

The second class embraces such arms as have been granted by the Herald's College by royal command, as a reward for distinguished services to the state. These instances are comparatively rare, and are very honorable to the recipient.

The third class consists of the coats-of-arms granted by the Herald's College on payment of certain fees, which, though legal, are not of any value at present to the genealogist, and hardly a source of much comfort to the possessor. This class of coat armor has been a comparatively modern institution, though some instances are recorded of a date prior to the settlement of New England.

It is with the first class above enumerated that we have at present to deal. Though some abuses had crept into the system, it is a fair assertion to make that coats-of-arms, used prior to 1625, were generally the rightful property of the users.

If we find, then, any person using a seal with a shield thereon engraved, in New England, during the score of years following the first colonization of Plymouth and Massachusetts, we may fairly conclude his social position in England was among the gentry or yeomanry. Even in times subsequent to the date I have thus fixed, considerable reliance may be placed upon the use of seals, as affording a clue to trace a family. We must consider that the high moral sentiment of our forefathers, their cheerful acknowledgment of the different social distinctions, and even the lack of any conceivable motive for fraud, alike forbid the suspicion that any man here, in the early days of the Colony, would have wished or dared to use a coat-of-arms when he was not entitled to it.

Again, as these seals require a skill in cutting and setting them not possessed by any one here, I believe, before 1700, or perhaps 1750, the

ORIGINAL LETTER OF THE REV. JONATHAN PARSONS.

[Communicated by SAMUEL H. PARSONS, ESQ., of Middletown, Ct.]

*Newbury, Jan'y 8, 1749-50.*Very Dear & Hon^d Sir,

The News of your being ship'd and gone for England was quite unexpected & very surprising to me, (tho I heard three or four months ago you talk'd of such an undertaking) Because I had enquired of Justice Griswold who was at my House not long since, and he told me that he thought there was nothing at all in it. I wish God may give you a prosperous voyage & Favour in y^e sight of our Rightful & Gracious Sovereign King George, in all matters that you shall spread before him agreeable to Righteousness: and I have no Jealousie that you will ask for any things in your own or others behalf but what you think so. As soon as I thought of writing I long'd to hear of y^e particular circumstances of your Family & friends, that I might write to you of them, tho' you so lately took your leave of them, but I could hear nothing in particular tho Capt. Sheldon of Lyme wrote me a Letter y^e 28th of Decr, wherein he signifies y^t it is a General time of Health in those parts. What affairs you are entrusted with to take up your time & employ your great abilities I know not, but I can't think you would so embarrass yourself with business as to take you quite off from speaking a word in y^e Dear Cause of Liberty of Conscience, if a fair opportunity presented, you have often espoused in Connecticut Assemblies, as well as more privately, with arguments y^t can never be answered any other way than by a Majority of Hands. And if need be, I persuade myself y^t you will not be silent upon y^t Head, now you are on y^e other side of y^e water.

With these Hopes, Hon^d Sir, I am encouraged & beg leave to lay before you some few hints of y^e Circumstances of a considerable Congregation of Presbyterians in Newbury with whom I am settled as their Pastor by y^e Concurrence of y^e Presbytery of Boston. They are a People constantly harrassed by y^e Parishes wherein they Dwell on account of Taxes towards the support of those ministers in y^e Independent Churches on whose ministry they cannot attend; and can't get any relief from y^e General Court of this Province, tho they have frequently sought for y^e same, they seem'd very loath to expose the Conduct of the Province in such an affair, & therefore waited with long Patience & went often with prayers to y^e Assembly. But since they find no Intreaties will prevail, they have, after seeking to y^e Father of Light for Direction, Unanimously agreed that Duty to God, themselves & their fellow sufferers obliged them to prefer an Humble Address to our gracious Sovereign imploring y^e Interposition of his Wisdom & Authority & to leave the Event to God.

I am sure you'l allow me to speak a word or two about y^e People, since it is on such an occasion; and I have had more than four years opportunity to observe them; They appear upon this long acquaintance, to be a kind, well Disposed, peaceable people in General; and a great number of them are in a Judgment of Charity, solid & excellent Christians. Some of them are esteemed y^e most capable men for Publick Business of any in this Great Town, and even their adversaries thro' necessity are glad to make use of them in y^e most Difficult Affairs of a Temporall nature which they meet with. And as to their Religion, they are not among y^e number of those wild, friekish People y^t are scattered about in some

parts of y^e Country, but seem to be as careful to avoid an Apish sort of Religion, as any Congregation that I know. Their withdrawal from y^e former places of Publick Worship was more than seven years ago, & was then & is still look'd upon Warrantable by some of y^e most substantial ministers in Town & Country, as I could easily make appear were it needful. And as to their Temporal Circumstances, some of them are, I suppose, as wealthy as any in Newbury, except some of y^e Church of England. Others are Honest, Industrious People; but some are poor, & particularly we have many Poor Widows, left so by y^e Death of their Husbands in Cape Breton Expedition. Perhaps we have more Poor Widows than there is in several of y^e other Congregations in Town put together; for the People tell me it appears by y^e List that more went from our Congregation upon that Expedition than from all y^e Congregations besides, altho there are seven Worshipping Assemblies in all besides our Church.

These things in General, I think represent y^e Disposition, Conduct, & Temporal Circumstances of y^e People—And these people are drest up in Bear-Skins & worried by their fellow creatures, their money is taken from them, some have their goods sold for a song; their bodies drag'd thro' y^e Streets & imprison'd with a "*Lie you there till you have paid y^e uttermost farthing.*" I dont remember to have met with any instances, in y^e History of New England equal to what I have seen of this nature with my Eyes, except y^e strange treatment of y^e Quakers; And it all arises from no other cause than y^e Lusts of Men; unless the Conscientious Scruples of our people, (all things considered) refusing to help their neighbors support those ministers on whose ministry they never attend, may be called a cause. 'Tis enough to move an heart of Stone to see one's neighbors, but especially to see sober, honest & pious friends, Drig'd about upon y^e ground, thrown into Carts or upon Sads & hall'd to Prison by fellow Protestants who have no better claim to Liberty of Conscience than their oppressed Brethren. If I understand our charter, the Usage that I have seen & y^e Language that at such seasons are not fit to be named among a professing People. My Heart dreads the doleful consequences that must follow such things unless God in Mercy prevent. And can you, Honored Sir, hear a sketch of these things & not exert yourself in favour of y^e oppressed to y^e utmost of your power, if God should give you an opportunity? I am sure you cannot. I know your Attachment to Liberty too well, to think you would not do every thing that appear'd proper to be done by you, upon all seasonable opportunities & before all men. I have still a grateful remembrance of your indefatigable efforts with the Court in Connecticut for the Liberty of the People, & Remember y^e Thanks which y^e Government gave you for y^e same. Had some gentlemen laid by all prejudice, a great deal of y^e Confusions that have arisen about Religion had never been known: Will you, Dear Sir, Nay can you forget y^e miserable State that your Mother Country is coming into thro oppression, merely from violences used for conscientious scruples in matters of Religion? Now you have crossed the Ocean and are at an higher Board than any here, only look back upon us, & think how many, directly against Charter Privileges, are Rending their fellow servants to pieces, because they dont see with their eyes; Have you the Bowels of a Father & y^e abilities of a Master? Surely y^e one will be burned within you, & y^e other you will make use, for y^e Relief of Distressed Children! I am persuaded that our gracious Sovereign y^e King

has not any subjects more Dutiful, nor more strictly attached to y^e House of *Hanover* than those that are trampled upon in the manner that I have related; and if you should exert yourself in some proper way for their help, I think it will be a clear Evidence of your approving the Happy Establishment in that Illustrious Family; And besides there is Reason to hope that you will do more service for God & your Country by using your Interest and Influence for the redress of this Evil, while you are waiting His Majesty's Pleasure, than you can possibly do in a neglect. I believe you think that Abundance of that wildness which has prevailed in C——t and spread from thence, has been very much owing to y^e Strange proceedings of some Courts with y^e People that were called New Lights; and there is Danger in this Province not only on y^e one hand, of an Increase of y^e like Evils, but on y^e other of y^e most open & growing contempt of all Religion by Multitudes, unless the Lord should help us respecting y^e article of Liberty & y^e King's most Excellent Majesty should be most graciously pleased to discharge us from supporting a Ministry which we think is not safe & which we can't in Conscience attend upon. Therefore I beseech you once more, Hon^d Sir, for God's Sake, for Religion's Sake, & for the sake of y^e Peace and Happiness of the People that you would (as need may call for it) kindly interpose & help us in these matters; Our Committee have mentioned you to Mr. Parbridge who is Agent for us before the King in Council; & probably he will show you their Letter, if you should have an Inclination to see it.

I wrote to Dr *Avery* in y^e Fall of the year, & if he should think worth while to take notice of us, you will be able to let him know who I am, and what you apprehend of me, if you think proper; I ask no favor but y^e naked Truth, and that you will speak if you say any thing. Herewith I send you a true copy of the Recommendation which Mr Beckwirth drew up, & both y^e ministers of Lyme sign'd it just as I was taking my Leave of those parts & expected to go & Preach at Newbury where I am since settled. You'll see that y^e Recommendation refers to a Council which gave me my Liberation. Perhaps you may see some occasion to Improve it, & if not it may lie with other waste paper.

That you may be continued for a Blessing to y^e World—may be abundantly succeeded at y^e Court of Great Britain—find much favour in y^e sight of our Gracious King & be Returned safely to your Native Country for a Greater Blessing than ever, is the Prayer of Hon^d Sir your most obedient Son & Servant,

Jonathan Parsons.

P. S. Salute Dr. *Avery* for me and all other Friends.

Yrs ut supra.

Excuse my using a Clerk to write over my Letter from my short hand; The want of Time obliged me to do it.

To Elisha Williams, Esq., London, England.

(Answered by Mr. Williams, August 11, 1750.)

(NOTE.)—"Elisha Williams, Esq.," (to whom the preceding letter was addressed,) was the son of the Rev. William Williams of Hatfield. He was born August 24, 1694, graduated at Harvard College, 1711; studied Divinity with his father, and was ordained as a minister in Newington, in Wethersfield, Conn., October 22, 1722. After his marriage with Eunice Chester of Wethersfield, he studied law and was frequently elected a member of the Legislature from Wethersfield. In 1726 he was installed Rector of Yale College, the duties of which he faithfully discharged until 1739, when ill health obliged him to resign. He returned to Wethersfield and was elected to the Legislature, and appointed Judge of the

Superior Court. Afterwards he was appointed Chaplain of the Regiment sent by the State of Connecticut to Cape Breton, and was subsequently appointed to the command of a regiment of one thousand men in an intended expedition against Canada. *In December, 1749, he went to England to receive the wages due to himself and his regiment.* While there his wife died, and before his return he married Miss Elizabeth Scott, daughter of the Rev. Thomas Scott, of Norwich, England. He returned home in April, 1752, and died 24th, 1755, as will appear by the following inscription in the burial ground at Wethersfield :—

"The Hon'ble Col'l Elisha Williams, shin'd in excelling Gifts of Nature, Learning, and Grace, in Benevolence universal. Firm in Friendship, in Conversation pleasant and Instructive. In Religion Sincere, unaffected, cheerful; Truly Humble, of conjugal & Parental Affection, and Humanity. A Wise, Great & Good Man. 5 Years he was an Hon'r to the Sacred Ministry, in Newington. 13 years Yale College flourished under his Pious, Learned, & Faithful Instruction and happy Govern't; the Glory of ye College & Ornament of his Country. He often filled & adorned several Civil & Military Characters. Heaven claimed what was Immortal that Glad obeyed, & dross'd here the Dust to Rest till Jesus comes. Obiit 25th July 1755, Ætatis 61 yrs."

Trumbull, in his *History of Connecticut*, Vol. II., p. 303, says of Mr. Williams: "He was well furnished with academical literature, was a thorough Calvinist, and is characterized as one of the best of men." Dr. Doddridge, in a letter to a friend, writes thus: "I look upon Col. Williams to be one of the most valuable men upon earth; he has joined to an ardent sense of religion, solid learning, consummate prudence, great candor, and sweetness of temper."

He published a *Sermon on Divine Grace, 1727*. A *Sermon on the death of Thomas Ruggles, 1728*; and a Pamphlet of 66 pages, entitled "The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants."

The Society, of which the Rev. Jonathan Parsons was the first Pastor, had its origin in the time of the great excitement produced by the labors of Edwards, Whitefield and others, one of whom was the Rev. Joseph Adams, who preached to the new Society, consisting at first of only 12 families, until by the advice and commendation of Whitefield, Mr. Parsons was called from Lyme, Conn. (where he had been settled as a Minister from March, 1731, till October, 1745,) to take charge of the new Society. In November of the same year he came to Newbury, and took the Charge of the Congregation in March, 1746, &c. In this Church, which from small beginnings arose to be one of the most numerous on the Continent, Mr. Parsons labored with great diligence and success until his death in 1776, when he was buried by the side of his friend Whitefield, beneath the pulpit which he had for so many years occupied.

For a more particular account of the establishment and origin of the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, Mass., see

"Cushing's History of Newburyport, p. 53."

"Coffin's History of Newbury."

"Historical Account of the First Presbyterian Church by the Rev. Samuel P. Williams, who was installed Feb. 18, 1821."

"Rev. Mr. Searls' Funeral Sermon on the death of Mr. Parsons."

"Rev. Jonathan Greenleaf's Memoir of Mr. Parsons, and Rev. Mr. Sprague's Biographical Sketches of the Presbyterian Clergymen of the United States." See, also, Vol. I., p. 272, of N. E. Gen. Register.

S. H. P.