

Preface by G. Marston Leonard

This book is the result of research commenced as early as 1856 by Elisha Clark Leonard. He was born at Middleboro, MA, in 1819 and died at New Bedford in 1894. He became practically stone deaf the latter part of his life, and because of this affliction together with his great interest in genealogical history he devoted much of his time in this work. He became a Director of the Old Colony Historical Society and at the time of his death was considered the leading genealogist of Bristol County. Living as he did in the heart of the "Leonard Country" and knowing many of the early generations of the Leonard family he was enabled to learn much of the early history of many of the Leonard families.

The large amount of genealogical records and material that has been published since Mr. Leonard's death has enabled the present writer to augment greatly the amount of information left in the earlier manuscripts. There are many difficulties attached to the writing of a complete and accurate history of the James Leonard family. The loss by fire of the early vital records of the Town of Taunton was a disastrous one. Although there is a published book of vital records of Taunton, it is compiled from parish records, cemetery records, old Bible records, and other private sources and is therefore incomplete. We have found several lines of Leonard descent which family tradition and other sources strongly suggest a descent from James Leonard, but there is no vital or other authentic record to prove it. Many families left Taunton and Raynham and moved west or to other places which at the time kept no vital records: their births and in some cases marriages occurred in Taunton where the records were lost and they died in places where no records were kept at the time.

Again, it requires a careful examination of the probate and other records to list correctly the descendants of James Leonard from the descendants of Solomon Leonard of Bridgewater, many of whom had similar names. Later we meet with the descendants of John Leonard of Springfield (Agawam), MA. There is no proof that James, Solomon, and John were related, but we assume that they may have had a common ancestor not far back.

It is unfortunate that the Leonard Family Association founded in 1901 could not have survived. It is only through the cooperative assistance of many that a book of his kind can be written and placed before the public.

There are several questions still undetermined regarding this genealogy of James Leonard, but the age and health of the present writer prevents his continuing research. However, in order that the amount of material collected herein should not be completely lost, this work is brought to the attention of those interested. It is hoped that others will continue the research and determine definitely the birthplace and home in England of James Leonard, also to determine whether the James Leonard who arrived in Virginia in 1635 was the James Leonard of Taunton. Also it is hoped connecting links can be found for the several lines of Leonard family descent.

There has been placed in the Appendix certain letters in possession of the present writer which later will be found at the Old Colony Historical Society in Taunton. The claim that the James Leonard family were descended from Sampson and Margaret Fienes Leonnard, Lord and Lady Dacre, was never accepted by Mr. E.C. Leonard. He took the pains to enter into correspondence with Sir Henry Barrett-Lennard in the 1890's (and whose letters are in the possession of the writer). In this correspondence it is shown that the claim cannot be sustained. Later data and the published book of the Dacre family confirm the falsity of the claim.

In the Appendix is a letter from Thomas Leonard, eldest son of James, and Clerk of the Iron Works written to his cousin Samuel Leonard in New Jersey that throws some light on why Henry Leonard did not remain in Taunton.

G. Marston Leonard
(about 1959)