



Hildreth Family Cemetery in Lowell (resting place of four generals)
Six Daughters of Dr. Israel Hildreth of Dracut

MEMORIES

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Hildreth family makes history

(George Adams Parkhurst, a former resident of Chelmsford now living in the Hildreth Hills Estates of Westford, is a retired journalist, historian and thespian.)

By GEORGE A. PARKHURST

LOWELL — The word "immigrants" brings to mind people who have recently arrived in the area, such as the Southeast Asian families that have settled in and around Lowell in the past several years.

But in reality, we're all immigrants — unless we have American-Indian blood coursing through our veins. The English colonists that settled in Chelmsford in 1653-1655 — while that town included much of Lowell and Westford — were immigrants from England who came via Boston, Cambridge, Woburn or Concord.

One of these original families bore the name Hildreth, a name that, over the years, has appeared prominently in town and city affairs.

The progenitor of this clan was Richard Hildreth. Born in England in 1605, he arrived at the port of Lynn about 1635. (A Thomas Hildreth, possibly Richard's brother, also came to Lynn at the same time. Thomas moved on to Southampton, Long Island, N.Y. and founded the Long Island branch of the Hildreth family.)

Richard settled in Cambridge with his first wife, Sarah, who died there in 1644. He was elected a "townsman" (selectman) in 1645, the first of several municipal offices that he held.

His name appears on the list of the 29 men who petitioned the General Court of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for a tract "on the river Merrimack at a necke of lande next to Concord river, near to Pawtucket." Another name on the petition was that of Robert Proctor, Richard's son-in-law.

When he came to America, Richard was accompanied by his wife and two children, Jane and James. Jane married Robert Proctor and settled in

Concord, moving to Chelmsford about 1654. James lived in what now is Westford. He was the progenitor of the Dracut and Lowell Hildreths.

Second marriage

~~Richard's first wife, Elizabeth, died in 1644. His second~~
time, his new wife, Elizabeth, bore him nine children, bringing the total to six daughters and five sons.

Richard died Feb. 23, 1693, and is buried in the third oldest identifiable grave in Forefathers Burying Ground behind the First Parish Church in Chelmsford center. Thousands of his heirs, spread across the country and in many foreign lands, have made outstanding contributions to society.

Included in this group are Westford Academy graduate Nettie Maria Stevens, the famed biologist; historian Richard Hildreth, whose name is engraved on the Boston Public Library and who is buried alongside poet Elizabeth Bar-

rett Browning in Florence, Italy; and Elizabeth Nesmith, world-renowned breeder of iris in her Fairmount Gardens and the first president of the Lowell Garden Club.

Also, Lt. Col. Moses Parker, shown in Trumbull's painting of the Battle of Bunker Hill; Dr. Thaddeus Hildreth who, at the outset of the California Gold Rush, struck gold and founded "Hildreth Diggings," a wild tent and shantytown of 1,000 miners (later re-named Columbia, which grew to 10,000 then became a ghost town 25 years later. It is now a state historic park).

Also, former Maine Gov. Horace Hildreth; Charles L. Hildreth, superintendent of the Lowell Machine Shop and bank president; Abijah Edwin Hildreth, who left home at 20 with \$50 in his pocket and became a manufacturing tycoon. There's a bust of him in the Groton library.

Crazy Amos

And then there was "Crazy Amos" Hildreth, who stood in Westford center and laughed at "the Millerites," members of a religious sect who gave away all their earthly possessions and planned on ascending to Heaven following the Great Comet Scare in the spring of 1843.

One of the most popular treats for many years was H.L. Hildreth's Original and Only Velvet peanut butter kisses.

Making headlines and creating controversy not too many years ago was Roger Hildreth, a prominent real estate broker who disappeared in the Maine wilderness while on a hiking trip.

Dr. Israel Hildreth Jr. of Dracut, fathered the famed "Six Sisters" and a son, former Lowell postmaster Fisher Ames, whose spouses and descendants are allowed burial in the private Hildreth cemetery at the junction of Aiken Avenue and Hildreth Street.

A rundown of these seventh-generation offspring follows:

- Rowena (1814-1913) married Henry Reade. Among their children was General Philip Reade.

- Sarah Jones (1816-1876), a New York actress in the 1830s, married Civil War General Benjamin F. Butler,

who also served as Bay State governor and congressman. Their daughter, Blanche, married General Adelbert Ames, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts. Blanche's great-grandson is actor George Plimpton.

- Fisher Ames (1818-1873) married Lauretta Coburn.

Their daughter, Rowena Hildreth, married Charles Dana Palmer. Rowena and Charles Palmer had a son, Dana, who was the father of Peggy (Palmer) Costello, Hildreth (Palmer) Aldrich (wife of Don Aldrich, Joanne's older brother) and Eleanor (Palmer) Lynch.

- Susan Hale (1819-1874) ~~that courtesy titles can derive on their professional lives. By adopting Mrs. as their preferred title of address, Boston women may be able to~~ married Capt. John Milton Grosvenor Parker. One of their daughters married Dr. Joseph V. Meigs.

- Laura Wright (1826-1891) married George Howard Pearson. Their son, General Gardner W. Pearson, married Alice Duckworth. Their children included Whit, John and Sarah Pearson. Gardner's brother, Fisher Hildreth Pearson, had daughter, Laura, who became Mrs. Blanchard Pratt.