

**THE FOUNDING OF CHARLESTOWN
BY THE SPRAGUES, A
GLIMPSE OF THE BEGINNING OF
THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY
SETTLEMENT**

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The Founding of Charlestown by the Spragues, a Glimpse of the Beginning of the Massachusetts Bay Settlement by Henry H. Sprague

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HENRY H. SPRAGUE

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THE FOUNDING OF CHARLESTOWN

It is substantially undisputed that Charlestown, the first permanent settlement in Massachusetts Bay, was founded by the three brothers, Ralph, Richard and William Sprague, and that they, accompanied by three or four others, whose names have never been ascertained with certainty, were the first permanent settlers of the plantation. Considerable question has, however, arisen, more especially in the later years, relative to the time of their arrival in New England, and, consequently, a question as to the actual date of the founding of Charlestown, whether in the year 1628 or 1629. The latter date has oftener been given by later writers, though in the early period the date was almost universally fixed as 1628, and the Spragues were declared to have arrived with Gov. John Endicott in that year in the ship *Abigail*.

The later writers, who have taken the ground that the Spragues did not come over with Endicott in the ship *Abigail* in the year 1628, and that the settlement of Charlestown was effected in the year 1629, base their conclusions on the grounds (1) that the original account of the settlement, contained with the town records, states that the Spragues came "at their own cost," as-

suming that Endicott was accompanied only by hired servants; (2) that there are in the first records of the town manifest errors in the earlier dates recited; (3) that the historical account declares that the Spragues came in "the same summer of anno 1628," whereas Endicott did not himself arrive until the month of September; (4) and that the first records, in naming "the inhabitants that first settled" in the town, included, with the names of the Spragues, the names of Messrs. Graves and Bright, and that Mr. Graves modelled and laid out the town, it being a fact that both Mr. Thomas Graves and the Rev. Francis Bright arrived in the year 1629.

The earliest authority for the founding of Charlestown, to which succeeding writers generally refer, is the copy of the first records of the town, so-called, but which begin with an independent historical account of the settlement, compiled in the year 1664 by John Greene, a son of the ruling elder of the church, as gathered by him from those who lived at the time and were actors in the events related.*

The historical account begins with the discovery of the region between Cape Cod and Cape Ann by Capt. John Smith, and runs as follows:—

*Frothingham's "History of Charlestown," pps. 2 & 12. The original records of Charlestown are now deposited with the city clerk of the city of Boston. In the records of Charlestown for the year 1664, it is recorded that "At a meeting of the Selectmen April 18, 1664, John Greene is appointed by us to transcribe ye records of this Towne and having begun ye same in a booke as far as follio eight most whereof is gathered by information of known honest men that lived & were Actors in these times * * * we do approve of ye same and consent that what is written on those seven pages remain as it is."

"Captn John Smith haveing (in ye Raigne of or Sovereaign Lord James by ye Grace of God King of England, Scotland, ffrance, and Ireland, Defendor of ye ffaith,) made A discovery of some pts of America lighted amongst othr places upon ye opening bettwixt Cape Codd & Cape Ann, Scituate & lying in 315 degrs of Longitude & 42 degrs 20 mints of North Latitude, where by Sounding & making up hee fell in amongst ye ilands, and advanced up into the Massachusetts Bay till he came up into ye River, bettwene Mishaum, (aftwards called Charlestown) and Shawmutt (aftwrds called Boston,) & having made discovery of the land, Rivrs Coves and Creekes in the sd Bay, & also taken some observations of the natures, dispositions, & sundry Customes of the numerous India[ns] or Natives inhabiting the same; hee returned to England, wher[e] (it was reported yt) upon his Arrivall hee prsented A mapp of the Massachusetts Bay to ye king, & yt the Prince (aftwards King Charles ye first,) upon enquierie & persuall of the aforesd River & the Scituation thereof upon the Mapp, appointed it to bee called Charles River.

"Now, upon the fframe yt then went abroad of the place both in England & Holland, severlt persons of quality sent over so[me] at their owne cost who planted this Country in severlty but for want of judgmt care, & ordrlly living, divers dye[ing] othrs meeting with many hazzards, hardships, & wants at length being reduced to great penury, & extreimity: were so tired out, yt they tooke all opertunities of returning to England,

upon wch sevelt places were altogethr diserted, & s[o] only some few yt upon A bettr principle transported themselves from England & Holland, came & settled their Pl[an]tation A litle within Cape Cod, & called the same Plymouth, [these] notwithstanding all their wants, hazzards, & sufferings, con[tinu]ed severlt yeares in A mann'r alone, at wch time this Contry was generally called by the name of New England.

“ At length divers Gentlemen, & Merchants of London obtained A Pattent & Charter for the Massachusetts Bay, (from or Sovereigne Lord King Charles ye first) gave Invitation to [such] as would (transport themselves from Old England to New England) to goe and possesse the same: and for their encourag[ement] the sd Pat- tentees at their owne Cost sent over A Company [of] scrvts, undr the Governement of Mr. John Endicutt who arri[ved] within this Bay, settled ye first Plantation of this Jurisd[iction] called Salem: undr whose wing there were A few also yt [did] settle & plant up & downe scatterring in severlt places of ye Bay: where, tho they mett with the dangers dilliculties, & [] attending new Plantations in A sollitary wildernesse so ffa[rre] remote from their Native Country, yett were they nott l[eft] without Company; for in the yeare of or Lord one thousand sixe hundred twenty eight, came over from England severlt people at their owne charge, & arrived at Sa[lem;] afr wch, people came over yearely in great numbers; in [some] yeares many hundreds arrived, & settled not only in [the] Massachusetts Bay:

but did suddenly spread themself[ves] into othr Collonies also.

" Amongst others yt Arrived at Salem at their owne cost, were Ralph Sprague with his Brethren Richard & William, who with three or foure more, by Joint consent & approbation of Mr. John Endicutt Governor did the same Sunamer of Anno 1628, undertake A Journy from Salem and travelled the Woods above twelve miles to the westward, & lighted of A place Scituate and lying on the north side of Charles River full of Indians called Aberginians theire old Sachem being dead, his eldest sonne by the English called John Sagamore, was theire chiefe, & A man naturally of A gentle & good disposition, by whose free consent they settled about the hill of ye same place, by the said Natives called Mishawum, where they found but one English pallisadoed & thatched house, wherein lived Tho Walford A Smith, Scituate on the south end of the westernmost hill of the Eastfield A little way up from Charles Rivers side, and upon Survey they found it was A necke of Land Generally full of Stately timber as was the maine, & the land lying on the east side of the river called Mistick River, from the farme Mr. Craddocks servts had planted called Mistick, wch this Rivr led up unto, and indeed generally all the country round About was an uncooth Wildernesse full of timber.

"The inhabitants yt: first settled in this place & brought it into the denomination of An English Towne was in Anno 1628 as follos, vizt.

Ralph Sprague,
Richd. Sprague,
William Sprague,
John Meech,
Simon Hoyte,
Abra. Palmer,
Walter Pamer,
Nicholas Stowers,
John Stickline,
Tho. Walford, Smith,
yt. lived heere
alone before,

And Mr. ——— Bright Minister to the Companies Servants.

“By whom it was Jointly agreed & concluded yt this place on the North side of Charles River by the Natives called Mishawum, shall henceforth from the name of the River bee called Charlestowne wch was also confirmed by Mr. John Endicutt, governour.

“It is jointly agreed & concluded by the Inhabitants of this Towne yt Mr. ——— Graves doe moddle, & lay out the forme of the Towne with Streets about the Hill wch was accordingly done and approved of by the Governor.

“It is Jointly agreed & concluded, yt each Inhabitant have A two Acre Lott to plant upon, & all to fence in Common wch was accordingly by Mr. ——— Graves measured out unto them.

“Upon which Ralph Sprague & othrs began to build their houses, & to prepare fencing for their lots wch was afterwards sett up almost in A Semi-Circular forme on the South and SouthEast side of yt field laid out to them, wch lies Scituate on ye Northwest side of the Towne Hill.

Mr. Graves who had charge of some of the servts. of the Company of Patentees with whom hee built the great house this year for such of the sd Company as are shortly to come over wch afterwards became the Meeting house.