

**WOBURN RECORDS OF
BIRTHS, DEATHS, AND
MARRIAGES, FROM 1640
TO 1873. PART I. - BIRTHS**

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EDWARD F. JOHNSON

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FROM 1640 TO 1873.

PART I. - - BIRTHS.

ALPHABETICALLY AND CHRONOLOGICALLY ARRANGED BY

EDWARD F. JOHNSON.



WOBURN, MASS. :
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1890.

PREFACE.

The original records of births, deaths, and marriages in Woburn, prior to the year 1843, are contained in two volumes. The first volume embraces the period from 1641 to 1768, and is, in fact, a copy of the original book of entry. According to the Rev. Samuel Sewall, the records of births, deaths, and marriages were first entered in an old blank volume, the leaves of which gradually became loose and badly worn. When Major James Converse was chosen town clerk, in 1688, he copied these records into a book of his own, and used it in place of the original volume. The use of this latter book, however, was resumed by Mr. Samuel Carter, who succeeded Major Converse in the clerk's office in 1690. In December, 1691, Major Converse was again elected clerk, and held the office continuously until 1701. He transferred Mr. Carter's entries to his own book and again made use of it in place of the old volume, although the former book still remained his own private property.

At a town meeting, held March 5, 1705, the fact that the town records proper were in a loose and perishable condition was brought to the attention of the citizens by James Fowle, town clerk, and the town thereupon offered to purchase Major Converse's transcript for twelve shillings. This offer was accepted, and his book was thereafter used as the clerk's register; in it were recorded the births, deaths, and marriages down to and through a portion of the year 1768.

The second volume of births, deaths, and marriages extends from 1768 down to 1844, and is an original. When Mr. Nathan Wyman was chosen town clerk, in March, 1844, he procured separate record books for the births, deaths, and marriages, respectively, and began to keep a more systematic and detailed record than had been done previously. He re-copied the entries made by his predecessor from and after Jan. 1, 1843, and commenced an index.

At a town meeting, held Aug. 31, 1846, it was voted:—

"That the town clerk be instructed to cause certain old town records to be rebound, and the two first volumes of the records of births, deaths, and marriages to be copied at the expense of the town."

At a subsequent meeting, held in November of that year, it was further voted:—

"That the town clerk employ the Rev. Samuel Sewall of Burlington (upon the best terms he can) to recopy the records of births, marriages, and deaths from the year 1642 to the year 1843."

In accordance with these votes, Mr. Sewall began his work in January, 1847, and, in July of that year, he inserted an advertisement in *The Guide-Post*, as the only newspaper then published in Woburn was called, in which he asked the citizens to furnish such additional data as they could, from family records and other authentic sources, to the information contained in the town records. In this advertisement Mr. Sewall goes on to say:—

"From 1793 to 1796, inclusively, there were only 193 births of record, which is 49 less than were recorded as occurring in the corresponding years of the preceding century, viz.: from 1693 to 1696, when the town had been settled but little more than fifty years. From the records it would appear there were no marriages in Woburn in 1745, 1746, or 1750; and as to deaths, the records tell of only 37 from 1785 to 1800, inclusively, and of 6 only from 1801 to 1824, or an aggregate of 43 deaths in 30 years."

From the answers to his advertised inquiry and also from various other sources, Mr. Sewall made large additions to the original number of recorded entries, as will appear more exactly in the extract, which is quoted below, from the preface of his book. All these additions are incorporated into the present publication, and are not in any way distinguishable from those belonging to the original record. Any person desirous of knowing whether a particular entry is a part of the original record, or has been added to it by Mr. Sewall, can readily do so by consulting Mr. Sewall's transcript, in which he will find that the venerable historian has taken pains to give his authority for every name and date which he has interpolated into the original.

Mr. Sewall spent nearly four years in making his transcript, completing it in November, 1850. A careful comparison of his copy with the original shows that the work was done with great fidelity. It is, in fact, practically free from error, and the orthography is precise and legible. He composed a very elaborate preface for it, carefully reviewing the early records, pointing out many interesting facts in connection therewith, and fully explaining the nature and scope of his own work. Did space permit, I should like very much to reproduce these "Prefatory Remarks," as he styles them, in full; but under the circumstances, I can give only the two following interesting extracts from them:—

"And here it seems proper to remark that a great variety is observable in Woburn Records in the spelling of several surnames that have always or for many years been common in the place. What were once uniformly written *Tompson* or *Tomson* and *Reed* are now as uniformly written *Thompson* and *Reed*. *Bucknam* has slipped accidentally (to appearance) but irreclaimably into *Buckman*; and by different hands, and in some instances even by the same hand at different times, *Russell* is presented as *Rossel*, *Kendall* as *Kendal*, and *Eames* as *Aams*. Nor are these the most surprising transformations in this kind. In the progress of time, *Blaggett* has hardened into *Blodgett*, and *Brush* has softened into *Bruce*; *Bottler* has melted into *Butters*, and *Tottingham* has dwindled into *Totman*; *foal* has put off its venerable but antiquated dress for the more modern one of *Forte*; and *Flagg*, for mere fashion's sake, called itself *Flegg* for years, but has at last wisely come back to *Flagg* again."

It would be difficult to improve upon the happy language of the above quotation. It is, in fact, the most felicitous passage from Mr. Sewall's

pen which I have ever read. In the following extract no play on words is attempted; but, from an historical point of view, the facts which it details are of the greater value:—

"To the Births, Marriages, and Deaths originally recorded in the Town Records, numerous additions have been made in this transcript, especially to the Deaths. Some of these additions have been obtained from the County Records, and from private information through the kindness of several individual gentlemen. But I am more particularly indebted for them to the Records of the First Church of Woburn; to a copy of Inscriptions on the Grave Stones in the two ancient Burial Grounds of Woburn, taken by Nathan Wyman, junr., Esq., the present Town Clerk; to inscriptions in the Burial Ground of the once Second Precinct of Woburn, till 1799, now Burlington; to a List of Deaths in the said Second Precinct, kept by its then minister, the late Rev. John Marrett, from his ordination in 1774; to the Records of the Church and Town of Burlington; and to the copious Memoranda of that noted citizen and careful observer of the events of his time, Samuel Thompson, Esq. For all which and other numerous contributions to the completeness of this Work beyond what the Records alone would have rendered it, I have severally given credit in the proper place.

The Births here copied from the original records are in number	6,375
Do., here added from the above sources, or either of them	102
Total	6,477

The Marriages copied in this transcript from the records are	1,502
Do., here added to the above	119
Total	1,621

The Deaths recorded originally in the Records were only	1,268
Do., additional in the transcript to the Recorded List are	1,537
Total	2,805

N. B. In the above Computation, all Repetitions of Records that have been observed, are excluded."

The above statements show what an invaluable service the Rev. Samuel Sewall did for the records of Woburn, — a service greater, in my opinion, than his work on the History of Woburn, and one entitling him to the gratitude of present and future generations. The town took the following recognition of his work, at a meeting held Jan. 20, 1851:—

"*Resolved*, That the Selectmen be instructed to pay the Rev. Samuel Sewall one hundred and fifty dollars in full for his services in recopying the Records of Births, Marriages, and Deaths for the town from 1640 to 1845."

"*Resolved*, That the town tender their thanks to Mr. Sewall for the faithful and beautiful manner in which he has recopied their records."

Beginning with Vol. I., No. 1, of the *Woburn Journal*, Oct. 18, 1851, Mr. Nathan Wyman published in full Mr. Sewall's transcript of births, deaths, and marriages, and in addition to them he also printed the further record of births and marriages from 1843 through the year 1854, and the deaths from 1843 through the year 1855, completing the publication July 5, 1856. No attempt was made, however, to improve on the arrangement of the records; and, to judge from the printed result, little pains seem to have been taken to secure an accurate publication of names and dates. It has

since become quite common for towns to print their records, or portions of them, in the local newspapers; but Mr. W. R. Cutter informs me that the custom of printing the record of births, marriages, and deaths in such newspapers originated with Mr. Wyman, who may therefore be styled the pioneer in this kind of work.

The annual publication, with which we are now so familiar, of the births, deaths, and marriages in the town reports commenced with the town report for the year ending Feb. 28, 1865. For the single year 1850, however, these records, together with the proceedings of the town meetings held in that year, were published by the town in a little pamphlet which bears date June 1, 1851.

About four years ago I had occasion to consult our records of births, deaths, and marriages, in connection with some professional work. I desired to obtain the full genealogy of a certain Woburn family, so far, at least, as it was to be found in the local records. Owing to the complete absence of any index prior to the year 1813, it was found necessary to look through the whole recorded list of births, deaths, and marriages down to that date. To do this task systematically and accurately involved a great many hours of hard work, as others can testify who have had similar work to perform. I found, furthermore, that the index from 1813 was imperfect, and not to be relied upon where accurate information was sought; and I had to continue my palustaking search throughout the entire body of the records. My experience in this matter set me to thinking, and the result of my mental operations was that I began the digest of the births in the form in which they appear in the pages of this book.

The method which I have adopted differs somewhat from that of any similar publication which has come to my attention. In works of this kind it is usual to reproduce the original record in its entirety, repeating its full phraseology, and perpetuating all the errors and idiosyncrasies of spelling with which all old records abound. An index is then added as separate and distinct matter.

In the system which is here employed no index as such is used or needed. The surnames are all grouped and arranged in alphabetical order, and under each surname the Christian names follow chronologically. There is no repetition of the surname with each entry; the word "born" is omitted, and the words "son" and "daughter" are represented by the abbreviations "s." and "d." Modern orthography is substituted for the ancient spelling, and the whole record is designed to give, in a compact, convenient, and readable form, freed from all unnecessary verbiage, and unobscured by any contortions of the "King's English," a full record of the date and parentage of each child whose birth is recorded in our present town records, down to the year 1873.

Unless one has undertaken a task of this kind, he cannot fully realize the amount of labor which it involves. With Mr. Sewall's additions, there are upwards of 13,300 entries of births from 1641 down to Jan. 1,

1873. To take each entry from the original and insert it in its proper alphabetical place, and afterwards to check off and verify each transcript, was a task of no little magnitude, and required many months of continuous, arduous work. Nor does this statement tell the whole story. Extended research was sometimes demanded before a decision could be reached as to what family, or under what surname, a given entry belonged. The misspellings of the original records rendered this portion of the work extremely difficult and tedious. Ames was confounded with Eames; Cutler with Cutter; Duren with Doran, etc. The spelling of the early Irish names, in particular, was almost grotesque; and, in order even to approximate correctness in the arrangement of many of these surnames, a consultation of assessors' books and files of newspapers, and personal inquiry of individuals were indispensable. As an extreme illustration, it may be stated that one well known Irish surname was spelled differently in each entry. There were nine births recorded and the surname was spelled nine different ways. That I have succeeded, in every instance, in placing the entry under the proper surname, is not to be expected. I hope, however, that, in the main, accuracy in this particular has been secured.

It will be noticed that the ancient mode of dating, known as Old Style, which was in vogue prior to 1752, has not been followed implicitly. Whenever a date occurred in January, or February, or before March 25, I have given the year which, according to New Style, properly represents the fact. There would seem to be no valid reason why the birth of John Richardson, of Woburn, for instance, should be given as Feb. 5, 1731-2, any more than we should, at the present day, refer to George Washington as having been born Feb. 11, 1731-2. If our historians deem it correct to speak of the English Revolution as occurring in Feb., 1689, why should we refer to local events as happening in Feb., 1688-9? While I have not changed the day of the month from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, as is now universally done in referring to the natal day of the Father of his country, I have, as stated above, uniformly adopted the year which, according to the present method of reckoning time, would be regarded as correct chronology.

The query will undoubtedly arise: "Why did you stop at Jan. 1, 1873?" My answer is, that when I had reached that point with the copy of the births, and thus had brought it to the end of Mr. Nathan Wyman's clerkship of twenty-eight years, the work had begun to assume such proportions that it was deemed advisable, before carrying the work farther, to bring the record of deaths and marriages down to the same date. It was not until 1888, however, that this latter task was accomplished; and the whole undertaking had then involved so much more time and labor than I had anticipated, that it was concluded to leave the work there, trusting that the proper public authorities would some time see the advisability of completing the task, the inception of which I had voluntarily assumed.

What has been done is a matter of private enterprise, and for it I have never expected any pecuniary reward. I had a strong wish to see our records placed in an accessible shape for consultation by our citizens, and by any others who might desire to acquaint themselves with the information which they contain.

If the present publication of the births is followed next year by a like publication of the deaths, and, in 1892, by the marriages, the manuscript for both of which is fully ready, the printing of the great bulk of the records of births, deaths, and marriages in Woburn will thus have been accomplished.

The records of the city of Boston, and of the towns of Braintree, Brookline, Dedham, and Lancaster, all in this State, have severally been published in book form, at the expense of the municipalities. In no one of these places, moreover, does the published records of births, deaths, and marriages come down to so recent a date as 1873; so that if the present publication of births is followed in succeeding years by that of the deaths and marriages, the city of Woburn will have a more complete publication of this portion of its records than that of any city or town in Massachusetts. The town of Dedham, however, voted last year to extend its published records down to the date of its two hundred and fiftieth anniversary.

After the publication of our records, down to the year 1873, has been completed, I hope the work of extending the publication down to the incorporation of the city will then be undertaken and accomplished.

In closing, I desire to acknowledge my indebtedness to Mr. William R. Cutter, our librarian, without whose kindly encouragement at the outset this work might not have been undertaken. I am also under obligation to him for many valuable suggestions, and for assistance cheerfully rendered at all times.

To Miss Lottie W. Wyman, who was engaged as a copyist, and who also assisted me in the subsequent verification of each entry, I am indebted for careful and conscientious work, some important portions of which were rendered gratuitously.

In every step of this compilation great precautions have been taken to guard against error by careful comparison and checking of each transcript with the original. I would not assert, however, that it is entirely free from mistakes, for I fully realize "*quam difficile caveantur errores.*"

EDWARD F. JOHNSON.

WOBURN, Feb. 12, 1890.