

**FATHER AND DAUGHTER: A
COLLECTION OF COGSWELL
FAMILY LETTERS AND
DIARIES, 1772-1830, PP. 5-127**

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Father and Daughter: A Collection of Cogswell Family Letters and Diaries, 1772-1830, pp. 5-127
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Root, Mrs. Grace McClure Dixon (Cogswell)

FATHER and DAUGHTER

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**A Collection of Cogswell
Family Letters and Diaries**

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(1772-1830)

EDITED BY

GRACE COGSWELL ROOT



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FOREWORD

Most of the following letters were given to me by Miss Mary Weld of Chestnut Hill and have since been turned over to the Library of Yale University. The remainder and the M. F. C. Hartford-New York diary were already in the Library.

August, 1924.

G. C. R.

"And ye Angel Gabriel being y^h at ancer at Pemaquid (1) was burst in pieces & cast away in ye storme & most of the cattell & other goodes with one seaman & 3 or 4 passengers did also perish therein, besides two of ye passengers yt died by ye way, ye rest having yr lives given ym for a prey." Thus the Reverend Richard Mather tells in his journal (2) why John Cogswell was permitted to land on the shore of the Americas on August 15, 1635. But unfortunately he does not tell us why John and his wife, Elizabeth, had seen fit in Trinity Term, 1635, (3) to sell for £40 their cottages, gardens, orchards, barn and pastures in Westbury and Westbury Leigh, in the County of Wilts, England, and set out for the New World. It may be said here that between 1625 and 1630 the business of weaving had suffered a very serious decline in England. (4) Whether or no this was the reason for the emigration of the Cogswells is conjectural. So probably the most satisfying way is for each of their descendants to answer the question for himself, according as he interprets the John and Elizabeth still stirring in his own blood.

John's English inheritance had been "the Mylls called Ripond, situated within the Parish of Frome, Selwood" and so he had naturally followed the family trade of manufacturing woolens, (5) while his wife Elizabeth, had borne him nine children.

Such was the history of the Cogswells up to the time when they found themselves wet and shivering on the rockbound coast of our homeland in midsummer, 1635. Besides his family, John had saved one other possession from the wreck of the Gabriel, a large tent, which, pitched on the shore of the Province of Maine, provided the "First Home of the Cogswells' in America." John soon busied himself in going to Boston and finding there a small ship, fetched his family in it to Ipswich in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay. The tract of land between the Kennebec and Piscataqua Rivers had been anglicanized by Sir Ferdinando Gorges while Dover and Exeter were infected with antinomians. So it is probable that a blue Puritanical wind kept the Cogswell's little barque sailing southward until it could head inland up the Agawam, which was an Orthodox River in those days. Here at "the further Chebokoe," in 1636, a grant of 308 acres of land was made to John Cogswell.

Once rooted in New England the Cogswells appear to have done their duty in conforming to the Puritan practice of auto-multiplication. But for the purposes of these pages we pass by another John and two Samuels, stopping at James, born in Saybrook, Connecticut, 1720. At the age of fifteen he "experienced religion" and his active ministry in the Congregational Church lasted sixty years. One deep rift in it was caused by his drinking a cup of tea. In the critical year, 1775, after the death of his adopted daughter, Miss Betsy Devotion, the Reverend James was so over-

(1) Pemaquid is on the eastern shore of Muscongus Bay, Maine.

(2) "Journal of Richard Mather, 1635" Boston. Printed and published by David Clapp over 184 Washington Street, 1850.

(3) In the Public Record Office, London, appears the following conveyance:— "In Charles First, Trinity Term, 1635. Anthony Selfe & Henry Allyn, Plaintiff & John Cogswell & Elizabeth, his wife, Defendants"

(4) "Founding of New England" by James Truslow Adams.

(5) There are factories occupying much the same locations and still owned today by Cogswells. "The Cogswells in America" by Jameson, published 1834.

come by shock that he was persuaded by sympathizing friends to indulge in the soothing stimulus of a panniekin of tea. This delinquency having been reported to the Committee of Inspection, the Dominie, always nervously sensitive to public opinion, was able to exculpate himself only by producing a certificate from his physician to the effect that the cup of tea had been prescribed. But amongst the general public, many aggrieved patriots continued to express their resentment by staying at home from church service. Doubtless his name and offence would have been published in the "Norwich Packet" and in the "New England Gazette" had not the news of the Battle of Lexington come just then and been found sufficiently absorbing to sweep into forgetfulness even the heinous sin of Tory tea drinking by the cloth.

James was graduated from Yale with the class of 1742. He studied theology, after graduation with the Reverend Solomon Williams. In 1744 he was recommended to the Church in Canterbury, Connecticut, by the Windham (Old Light) Consociation and also by a special New Light Council as a fit candidate for settlement. He was voted a call to settle in September, in consequence of which the major part of the church seceded and set up "separate" worship. The consociation met in December, 1744, as an ordaining council, and having decided that the separating majority had by voting to reject the Saybrook for the Cambridge platform made themselves into another church, proceeded to ordain the Rev. Cogswell.

James Cogswell married Alice Fitch in 1745.

The preceding lines have served as a foreword to the account of the life of their fourth child, Mason Fitch Cogswell, born September, 1761, at Canterbury, while his father was resident minister.

* * *

The name Mason had come into the family by the front door, the mother of the Rev. James being Mrs. Ann Dennison, nee Mason, granddaughter of Captain John Mason, Major of the Colonial forces and historian of the Pequot War. History books are fond of acclaiming this Captain Mason as the Puritans' own St. George. Certainly it would have been more appetizing had he roasted a dragon alive instead of seven hundred Indian men, women and children. At the time he calmly notes that "by the Providence of God there were one hundred and fifty more savages than usual in the village that night" (1). This pious expression goes to show that the Puritans preferred to keep their Bible open at the Old Testament.

Like many ministers of his day, the Reverend James was accustomed to receive pupils into his family, fitting young men for college and the ministry. Naphthalia Daggett, afterwards president of Yale College, enjoyed for half a year "the faithful grammar instruction of Mr. Cogswell." A later pupil was one Benedict Arnold of Norwich, then a bright little fellow, full of play and pranks, a recipient of many letters of counsel and warning from his excellent mother. (2)

When our little hero, whom we will call, M. F. C., was eleven years old his mother died. That same year his father, the Reverend

(1) "Founding of New England" by James Truslow Adams.

(2) "The History of Windham County" by Ellen D. Larned.

James, moved about eight miles to Windham, Connecticut. Here he became minister in the New Scotland Parish on a settlement of sixty pounds and an annual salary of eighty pounds. Within a few months he took to himself a new devotion, in the guise of a wife, by name Martha Lathrop, widow of his predecessor the Reverend Ebenezer Devotion, and the bridegroom promptly "settled into her pleasant homestead." Whether she had been the reason for his resigning his pastorate in Canterbury or whether upon arrival at Windham he had discovered she would make a good "Curate's Assistant" is not recorded. It must have been professional help the Dominie craved, for of his five children, one was married, two had died in childhood, one was attending Yale College (1) and only one, little Mason remained at home to be looked after. It appears that coincidentally with the arrival of the step-mother this last remaining child left the paternal roof. First, it was to live near Windham in the family of the Honorable Samuel Huntington. Little Mason appears to have had Devotion women to the right and left of him, for the wife of this Huntington was none other than the daughter of Mason's new step-mother. Very probably that was one of the reasons for sending Mason to live with the Huntington family, and another, most likely, was that there was a young Huntington, Samuel by name, the adopted nephew, with whom Mason could study preparatory to entering Yale. Here we happen first on the tri-partite alliance which held fast between the Huntington-Devotion-Cogswell families through the seventy years of M. F. C.'s life. Anyway, the background presented by the Huntington family and young Samuel, his comrade-at-arms, must have appeared very sympathetic to an eleven year old boy keen for playing at Indian skirmishes and Red-Coat routs. The Honorable Samuel Huntington was at all hours a striking Continental figure, but never more so than in these particular days when political reverberations were already beginning to sound through New and Old England.

Huntington had been born in 1731, and while apprenticed at the age of sixteen to a cooper, had aspired to the law and had devoted all his spare moments to its study. By 1761 he had established himself as a lawyer in Norwich, and was married to Martha Devotion, daughter of the Reverend Ebenezer Devotion of Windham. Having no children of their own Samuel Huntington and his wife early adopted a niece and nephew, Hannah and Samuel, children of the Reverend Joseph Huntington, of Coventry, Connecticut. Any reading of Norwich in these pre-revolutionary days shows the Huntington home to have been the political and social focus of that region.

"A number of young men studied law with Mr. Huntington (2) and

(1) The Reverend James Cogswell himself was thought of by some of the alumni as a candidate for President Clap's place at Yale in 1766.

(2) Samuel Huntington's public life began in 1764 as a Representative to the General Assembly. In 1773 he was elected a member of the Upper House; in 1774, Associate Judge of the Supreme Court of Connecticut; and in 1775, a member of Congress. He continued in Congress till 1780. He was elected a member of the Marine Court, was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, served as President of Congress from 1779-1781, and as then obliged to resign on account of ill-health. On retiring from Congress he resumed his office of Judge of the Supreme Court. In 1782 & 1783 he was again elected to Congress but resigned the office in the latter year. In 1784 he was appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; in 1785, Lieut. Governor; in 1786, Governor, which office he held till he died from "dropsy of the chest" in 1796.

were constantly at the house. This youthful element and the warm hospitality of Governor and Mrs. Huntington made their home a center of attraction for all the young people of the Town, and it is said, that after games in the parlor, the young guests would often return to the kitchen and dance away until the curfew rang at nine o'clock. . . . Mrs. Huntington is described as dressing 'very simply, often in a white short gown and stuff petticoat with stiffly-starched cap and clean muslin apron.' In the journal of the Marquis de Chastellux, who dined with Gov. Huntington in Philadelphia in 1780 while Mr. Huntington was President of Congress, he describes Mrs. Huntington as 'a good-looking lusty woman, but not young' who 'did the honors of the table, that is to say, helped everybody, without saying a word.' Governor Huntington was of middle size, with a 'swarthy' complexion and a 'vivid' and 'penetrating' eye; 'considering comfort and convenience' more than splendour in his domestic arrangements, 'modern and circumspect in all his movements, never frivolous' but always 'practical' in his conversation. He was 'a constant attendant at public worship and at conference meetings, in the absence of the minister, often led the services.' (1)

There is a letter extant from a J. Huntington to Dr. James Cogswell. I print it here because of the insight it affords into Puritanical faith when face to face with sorrow, because it reflects the friendliness between the Huntingtons and Cogswells, and most of all, because it contains the first written mention of our hero, Mason Fitch Cogswell, albeit as a little fever-blistered victim.

"To the Revd James Cogswell, Scotland Parish, Windham,

Very dear & Hond Sir,

I do not expect you will take the trouble of answering all the letters I write to you, though every line from you is very precious to me; but as my heart is always with you it is natural for me to write. It almost kills me to think of my "blasted hopes and short sweeting days." I once fondly expected to spend this summer in the sweet enjoyment of everything my heart could wish for in this world. Ah! how differently must I drag through the gloomy season if life is continued. Dear Sir, I don't forget you while I mourn for myself; my heart bleeds for you every day, if my prayers are heard God Almighty will be near to you in this day of uncommon trial. You have seen me, Sir, in every discovery of weakness which the excess of love, hope, fear and anguish could produce, and if you can still own me as your child and most dutiful friend, your candour will appear very great.

I have been exceedingly depressed of late; in the beginning of this week I rode as far as Windham hoping that riding and conversation would help me, which indeed it did; though before I got there, I once or twice almost determined to turn homeward; I often ride abroad if I am able; I design, if providence permit, to go to Norwich the beginning of next week with my little son; must go by the way of Lebanon as it is bad passing the River of Windham.

(1) "Old Houses of the Ancient Town of Norwich, 1660-1800," by Mary E. Perkins.

Wm Woolcott Esqre, a valuable friend of mine, who has repeatedly written to me in my affliction, will make me a visit the beginning of the week after next, des volenti; and if it should please God that the state of your family might permit you to do me the like favour I should receive it with great thankfulness. Sir, you are nearer my heart than any other valuable friend. I was grieved to hear at Windham that little Mason had a fever sore on his arm. God grant a speedy case. Why is it that a merciful God has laid his hand so heavy upon you and your dear family? But he is holy; "He giveth not account of any of His matters." "Man was not made to question; but adore."

As to the dreadful, the distressing share I have in the affliction of your family, my own sins easily account for it. My soul centered too much in that *dear object* whose sweet, lovely image can never be erased from it. He that made her so charming and desirable knows the strength of my temptation. I hope for his pardon for every deviation of my affection from their proper channels. Oh, how happy if I might always as sensibly love a present God as I have done some of his creatures!

I beg to be remembered to your children as one that has a tender love and pity for them; may they choose a *parent*, a *friend* who is far above all the claims of mortality.

"The Lord liveth, and blessed be our Rock, and may the God of our Salvation be glorified."

Sir, I subscribe, with tears, your most
dutiful, Obedient
Servant

Coventry, 28 May 1772
Revd Mr. Cogswell"

J. Huntington

By his first wife, Alice Fitch, James Cogswell had had a daughter named after her mother. This daughter died May 9th 1772. So from this letter one quite naturally supposes the bereaved J. Huntington to have been paying her his addresses.

* * *

In 1776 M. F. C. must have entered Yale. The story goes that his entrance examination was given him on the knee of President Daggett. It seems natural he should have sought an education at this particular college. His father had done so before him, and geographically it was near at hand. Then too, Yale represented the more orthodox expression of religion in education. It has even been said to have been started in protest against the more liberal and more wicked ways of Harvard. This point of view would have found sympathy in the Congregational breast of Dominie James, the father.

It is said (1) that Governor Samuel Huntington adopted and sent to Yale both his nephew, Samuel Huntington, and M. F. C. Anyway, in 1780, M. F. C. aetat 19, graduated as valedictorian and youngest man in his class. A class of 27 men which included such able ones as Matthew and Roger Griswold. There is extant only one letter about M. F. C.'s undergraduate days.

(1) "Yale University Biography. Memorials of Eminent Yale Men" by Anson Phelps Stokes.