

Written by Charles E. Benton, Descendant in 1912

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The immigrant Reed ancestor was Captain John Reed, who was born in England in 1633. In the English revolution he was for some time an officer in Cromwell's army. Born and raised in the tumult of that upheaval in behalf of representative government it is not surprising that he caught the full force of its spirit, and at the early age of sixteen he became a soldier, rendering important service to the cause.

A souvenir of this service which his descendants would hold priceless could they now recover it---the sword he wore---was preserved in the family for more than a century, but was finally lost sight of.

All traditions agree that he was eminent for strong will and high toned moral character for which Cromwell's officers were renowned. He was from Cornwall, England, and is supposed to have belonged to the large family of Reeds in Dorsetshire, one of whom, Col. John Reed, is mentioned in the parliamentary records as having held the Castle of Pool against the King's army.

It was well known that men who had been prominent in the Cromwell regime found England to be an unsafe place for such as they as soon as the throne was re-established in 1660, and this may have been what decided him to emigrate. Coming to this country in 1660 he settled first at Providence, Rhode Island, where he married Mrs. Ann Derby, a widow who had three children by her first husband, Francis Derby, and she became the mother of John Reed's five children.

He was doubtless a man of considerable means, and in 1684, he removed to Norwalk, Connecticut, having purchased a large tract of land there. In time the locality took its name from his family, and became known as "Reed's Farms." Establishing himself in the western part of the town he built his house on a favorable site a short distance easterly of the Five Mile River, a creek which forms the western boundary of the town. It stood on the north side of the old post road, and nearly two miles from the Long Island Sound. The site is nearly four miles west of what is now the city of South Norwalk.

This house was torn down in 1862. In 1899 I found in Darien, a few miles west of there, an aged couple, Mr. and Mrs. Walter Reed, (he a descendant,) who gave me an account of the house, and of its destruction. Its capacious chimney of stone, with its great fireplaces, was so strongly built, and its mortar so excellently compounded, that it was necessary to blast it apart with powder before it could be taken down.

It had evidently been a notable house of its day, but a cheap modern structure stood in its stead when I saw the place. When will people learn that it is cheaper and better to build additions to these old houses for what they need of increased room, and preserve the ancient structures in all their antique grandeur!

This Walter Reed was the last descendant of the name to occupy the Captain John Reed homestead, and when he sold it, which was in or about 1889, he reserved the plot containing the ancestral grave, which was in a field. He and his wife described to me their recollection of the place as it formerly appeared, the grave in former years being marked only by unwrought stones.

Newton (6) Reed, author of "Early History of Amenia," spent considerable time in investigating the history of this ancestor. Through his efforts there was in 1886 a suitable granite tablet erected at the grave, the cost of which was defrayed by some of Captain John Reed's descendants. The grave and monument are on what is now the Samuel Richards Weed place.

Of the life of this ancestor history is not as explicit in some respects as we might wish, but such records and family traditions as we have indicate that the greatness of the man was not a one-sided greatness, but that the unusual age to which he attained was but one indication of a strength which was shared alike by physical, mental and moral faculties. He had been an iconoclast in the English revolution, but now in peace he became a conservator of the social organism, deeming the victories of peace greater than those of war.

One act of his is worth noting in this connection. In this first house he arranged a large upper room, in which he invited the ministers of the neighboring parishes to alternate in holding services, and the tradition still remains that these were the first Christian services held in the neighborhood. Such a record of a time when sectarian narrowness was much more prevalent than it is at the present time indicates a broad and wholesome mind.

After the death of his wife, the date of which is not recorded, John (1) Reed married again, this time also a widow, a Mrs. Scofield of Stamford, Connecticut. He died in 1730 at the age of ninety-seven, and was buried in his own field, as already related.